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MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

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MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

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BY

MISS THACKERAY
(MRS RICHMOND RITCHIE)

PP. 6. 57

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TO

HESTER AND WILLIAM DENIS RITCHIE

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY THEIR MOTHER

KENSINGTON, *March* 18, 1881.

NOTE.

THERE are several well-known editions of Madame de Sévigné's Letters. Chief among them are M. de Monmerqué's comprehensive and admirably edited volumes. Besides, there are selections for the use of schools, of which Madame Tastu's is, I believe, the standard. An excellent edition, published by Messrs Firmin Didot, has been chiefly used in the compilation of this little handbook. It is preceded by a short memoir by M. Jacquinet, in which it is stated that Madame de Sévigné's Letters had always been admired, and were constantly handed about and copied by her friends, but that it was not till 1726 that the first edition was printed by the Abbé de Bussy, to whom "Pauline" —Madame de Simiane—had given transcripts of many of the originals. The Abbé must also have inherited from his father, Bussy de Rabutin, papers containing the original correspondence between the two cousins.

In 1754 Madame de Simiane commissioned the

Chevalier Perrin, an intimate friend, to bring out an edition authorised by the family, on condition that he omitted any passages reflecting on Madame de Grignan. He was also to leave out any private names and details likely to wound any of the survivors of those people mentioned in the original correspondence. M. de Perrin, in accordance with these directions, snipped and changed, and interpolated to his own fancy, and not a little to the indignation of subsequent critics (Sainte-Beuve being not the least among them). M. de Monmerqué has, by great labour and patience, been able to restore the original text, and much of the matter which Madame de Simiane (with a feeling which cannot be blamed) is supposed to have done her best to suppress.

Of the letters here quoted, the Vatel letter and the story of Picard are translated by Miss Ritchie; and some other translations are by Mrs Cracroft. I have also to acknowledge Mr Cracroft's kind help in giving me the notes and books he collected for his own interesting account of Madame de Sévigné, and that of Monsieur Jules Andrieu, whose great knowledge and familiarity with French literature are well known. I have put his initials to some notes which he has given me. Among the best commentaries upon Madame de Sévigné's text are the pictures which naturally belong to it. Petitot's portraits give a whole gallery of her historic characters. Madame de Sévigné herself is there in mid-age, as well as young and brightly beautiful; Ma-

dame de Grignan, with regular features, prim and coldly chiselled; Maintenon in her youth, more lovely than the lovely Marie de Sévigné herself; Ninon, with her strongly marked countenance. There, too, is the stately Grignan; La Rochefoucauld, magnificent and portly; the majesty of the King in its periwigged apotheosis; the romantic Mademoiselle, with her big features; and poor young Madame, with a likeness to her father, Charles I. Of all the pictures I have ever seen of Madame de Sévigné, the most interesting is one at Wykehurst belonging to my friend Mrs Huth. The grandmother is painted smiling and *débonnaire*, and holding up an oval portrait of her daughter, who looks white and red, and brown-haired, and conscious; while little Pauline, of the square nose, is staring up with her dark eyes. The celebrated pearl necklace is there, which is so often mentioned in the Letters.

Mr Hamilton Aïdé tells me of two charming miniatures. He has also, by the kindness of Lady Waterford, the possessor of the original picture at Beckett, given me a photograph of a portrait of Madame de Sévigné holding her baby-daughter on her knee: the child half turns with a childlike action, glancing as she turns aside. The mother sits bright, beautiful, and stately, with an air of lovely youthful domination and happiness.

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MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ, in a fit of enthusiasm for the works of one of her favourite moralists, once exclaimed, "Would that all Nicole's writings could be boiled down into a broth, and swallowed in one gulp!" Some such wish must often occur to the admirers of the *incomparable Marquise* as they read her famous letters, written from the little dark room, with its polished floors and lofty shadows, in the old hotel at Paris, to the two whole centuries of people who have come after the original recipient. The Hôtel de Carnavalet is still standing, as white and handsome and young-looking, for its age, as was its celebrated mistress. It is in a labyrinth of historic streets, of which the very names tell the story of the people who piled the long walls and gables, who made the archways, and stabbed each other in the postern-gates, or worshipped at the little shrines. Their de-

scendants have long since pressed beyond the narrow island which was once Paris, and have crossed the Seine, and are busy rearing commonplace new palaces in the place of those they destroy. The Hôtel de Sévigné, as it is now called, has fortunately escaped many revolutions and changes of dynasty, and still encloses its sunny courtyard in all the dignity and stately inconvenience of the royal times to which it belongs. Truly the sight of the old place must conjure up for all of us many ghosts with familiar names and faces, and among them that charming figure, graceful and tender, sincere, unreasoning and reasonable, who seems like a friend to us all. After reading her letters, and living with her in spirit for a while, we can almost hear her voice sounding in our ears across the two centuries of turmoil. Madame de Sévigné's voice rings very true and sweet and playful amidst the hideous discords of her time; and her apparition is indeed a gracious vision among the reckless phantoms of her age,—those subjects of that Grand Monarch, whose god was his belly, and whose good-breeding was the admiration of Europe. While his people are starving, and his mistresses stringing diamonds — while his unwilling armies are invading inoffensive nations, and his courtiers are conniving at every mad wickedness—Saint Simon dwells, in an ecstasy of contemplation, upon the extraordinary grace, the irresistible admixture of dignity and respect, with which the king would half rise from his seat at table to salute the tardy entrance of some belated dame of honour, at the same time storing in his memory a record of the lady's fallibility, to be resented at the first convenient opportunity.

Madame de Sévigné, in her youth, was no less enthu-

siastic about him than the rest; but, as years went by, her judgments became more just. Hers was a curious morality. She laughed where others might have wept; she seemed to take the times as she found them; she attempted no reform, though she could see wrong plainly enough where it existed. It was a sweet and happy temper, a mind that played lightly even with sorrows and wrong-doing; and yet this bright and apparently unconcerned existence was a protest in its way against the insincerity and abject selfishness of the Court. She at least did her best to make those about her happy. Her affection for her daughter was a sentimental enthusiasm almost passing the bounds of reason; but her relations with her family, her friends, her dependants, were most constant, touching, and human. There is in existence a legal document—the will of some poor retainer, who was found to have left all her worldly goods to the well-beloved mistress—that says more even than the farewell letter of Madame de Lafayette, who, on her deathbed, wrote to her friend, "I think I have loved you better than any other human being."

In a Court where lies and intrigues were as daily bread—where modesty was rare, and every standard of right and wrong overthrown by the brilliant and witty and well-dressed vices crowding in—this beautiful young woman, surrounded by flattery of every sort, by high living and low thinking, kept her dignity intact, her name pure and respected. She did not profess any special virtue, nor hold her garments back lest they should be soiled by contact with the petticoats of her more frivolous sisters. She was (to earnest minds perhaps) far too lenient in her tolerance for others, and especially where

those she loved were concerned. But the whole tenor of her life was just and self-respecting. She was not entirely free from the prejudices of her caste and times; she naively considered that to be of good family must needs have some influence on the decisions of Providence: yet in her daily practice she was certainly far in advance of her age—in her consideration for those who were dependent upon her, in her love of order, in her readiness to fulfil the duties and obligations of her position.

It has seemed the best and simplest plan to endeavour in this little book to tell her story in her own words, so far as may be possible; but how impossible it is to translate her words! One might as well try to translate into English the pleasant murmur of a brook on a summer day, or the song of a bird in the air.

I have attempted no elaborate criticism of her style[1] and manner of saying the ever-new, ever-delightful things which occur to her day by day; the tender, witty, laughable (rather than humorous) things and fancies; or again, of the vivid and great suggestions that fill her heart and mind, and ours, as we read. Her art is too complete for criticism, too simple for analysis; she has almost everything to say, and she says it.

[1] "La Fontaine wrote as she did—intuitively, irresistibly; La Bruyère is as picturesque, but more laboured; Saint Simon was vivid, but more matter of fact, less flowery and harmonious."—J. A.

CHAPTER II.

GRANDFATHER AND GRANDMOTHER.

Marie de Rabutin-Chantal was born in 1626, and was the daughter of an ancient and somewhat moss-grown Burgundian family, owning ruined castles, feudal rights, coats-of-arms without number, all of which had been upheld from time immemorial by fierce fire-eating Barons, whose portraits once hung—so we are told—in the old gallery at Bourbilly,—Guys, and Amés, and Christophers, with their ladies; some of them contributing royal blood from Denmark to the glory of the Rabutins, besides other kingly arms in their quarterings. So long as thirty years ago, their pictures were already dropping from the canvasses in the old gallery at Bourbilly, with one notable exception, which may be still extant for all I know. Among other distinctions, the family may count that of possessing a canonised saint, and it seems that her portrait (which was also one of the latest painted) was miraculously found to survive the others. The saint was the widow of one fierce Baron killed out hunting, the mother of another who died fighting the English (put to death, as one chronicler relates, by the hand of Oliver Cromwell himself). Madame de

Chantal, the saint, passionately loved her son and husband, and their tragic end was a bitter anguish to her. After her husband's death she had determined never to marry again; the religious ideas in which she had been brought up took entire possession of her mind; she distributed her rich wardrobe among the poor, and made a pious resolve to wear nothing but coarse woollen clothes. She dismissed the greater number of her servants, only retaining a moderate retinue to wait upon herself and her four children,—for she was the mother of this one son and three daughters, all of tender age.[1]

She then retired, it does not appear for what reason, to the chateau of Monthelon, near Autun, where she dwelt for some time with a very violent, ill-conducted, and arbitrary old gentleman, the father of her late husband, who seems to have treated her with intolerable insults and humiliations, all of which she bore with the greatest patience and humility, devoting herself to the care of her young children, of the neighbouring poor, and of some illegitimate children of the wicked old Baron also living in the castle.

In 1604, no less a person than Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, came to preach at Dijon, where Madame de Chantal's own father, President Fremyot, was living; and she obtained leave from her father-in-law (not without difficulty) to go home for a short visit, in order to attend these ministrations. Her biographer relates that at her very first meeting with the saintly

[1] 'Les deux filles de Ste Chantal, Aymée Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Baronne de Thorens, et Françoise de Rabutin-Chantal, Comtesse de Toulonjon,' by Madame la Comtesse de Menthon. These were Madame de Sévigné's aunts.

prelate she recognised him at once as a holy personage who had been revealed to her in a dream not long before. Saint Francis also immediately remembered a vision which he had seen of Madame de Chantal at his own home, the Chateau de Sales in Savoy. After several interviews, —during which the lady declared he did not seem to her to be a man, but an angel,—Saint Francis himself was quite overcome by the faith, the ardour, and the charity of his new disciple, in whose mind all this time the idea of leaving her home and giving herself up entirely to a religious life seems to have been steadily gaining ground. Saint Francis did not entirely discourage the scheme when Madame de Chantal first opened her heart to him on the subject, but he imposed upon her a probation of six years, during which she was to live by rule, and meditate upon her vocation. So fervently did she obey his commands, so ascetic was her daily life, that she became the admiration of all her neighbours, and even her disreputable old father-in-law yielded at last to so much virtue and austerity.

After many and forced delays, Saint Francis, in order to try his disciple's faith still further, proposed that she should enter into one of the severest of the Orders which then existed for women, and to this she enthusiastically agreed. Then the Bishop of Geneva disclosed to her his full mind, and announced that, if she entered into religion, it should be not as a neophyte, but as the foundress of an entirely new Order for the relief of the poor and the sick. At the same time he was not blind to the many sacred ties which bound her to the world. "I see a great chaos in all this," said her director, "but Providence will disentangle it."

President Fremyot seems to have had some presentiment of what was impending, for about this time he anxiously furthered the suit of a very rich Burgundian nobleman, a widower with a family, who was desirous to contract an alliance with the saintly Baroness. Needless to say that all persuasions were unavailing: to defend herself against her own possible weakness, she took an iron point, heated it in the fire, and with it wrote the name of Christ upon her breast. "I clung to the tree of the cross," she afterwards said, "for fear so many charming voices should lull my heart to compliance."

A marriage which she was far more disposed to look upon favourably than her own was that of her daughter, Aymée Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, with the Baron de Thorens, a younger brother of Saint Francis, an officer in the army. Marriages took place earlier in those days than they do now—the bride was only twelve years old. A letter of conciliation is still extant, written by Saint Francis de Sales to the old Baron de Chantal. It is addressed to "M. de Chantal, captain of fifty men-at-arms, Knight of the Order of his Majesty," and does credit to the saint's human as well as his superhuman qualities. It was not without difficulty that the old man's consent was obtained, for the young bride was a rich heiress, and the bridegroom was only the youngest of five brothers.

And now Madame de Chantal found at last courage to declare her resolve to her family, and to announce her definitive intention of quitting them all. Her father is said to have burst into tears, exclaiming, "Let me die before you leave me." But although the daughter wept, the saint was not shaken in her resolution. The day

after the marriage, when the family was assembled at the chateau of Monthelon, where the wedding had taken place, Madame de Chantal had another conference with her father, and her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges. She expressed herself with so much decision and clearness of purpose, and was so well upheld by Saint Francis, who persuaded her relations that hers was a divine inspiration, and any resistance on their part would be culpable, that they reluctantly yielded to her wish. The two unmarried daughters were to remain under her care in the convent, from whence she was also to superintend the young Baroness in her domestic affairs, her son was to be confided to his two grandfathers, and in three months the final separation was to take place.

Jeanne de Chantal took a touching leave of the old Baron at Bourbilly, who was then eighty-six years of age; but the real parting heartbreak was when she bade farewell for ever to her young son and to her aged father. There is an affecting story told of the young Baron de Chantal, her son, who, when the hour of her departure came, flung himself across the doorway, saying, "I am not strong enough, Madame, to hold you back, but if you leave us, it must be by stepping over the body of your only son." The mother burst into an agony of tears, but nevertheless forced her way across the threshold; and then, fearing lest they should think she regretted the step she had taken, she turned, smiling and radiant, announcing that though she left them God would not abandon her.

So she went her way, left her young son and her aged parents, founded many religious houses, made friends, converts, disciples, led a life of wide benevolence. Her

story is well worth following. Not only Saint Francis de Sales but Saint Vincent de Paul—it seems to have been a golden age for saints—were her advisers and companions. Her life was a curious mixture of the hearth and the cloister. She seems to have kept up her influence over her daughters, and to have advised them under every circumstance. The youngest died, the two elder were married by the saint, who seems to have provided the *trousseaux*, with frilled collars and silken bodices, among other details. The story of the Baronne de Thorens, who died at nineteen of grief for her young husband's premature death, is one of the most pathetic imaginable.

Meanwhile the young Baron, who had remained under the care of the old grandfather on the Chantal side, grew up handsome, reckless, accomplished, devout, fearing nothing, fighting as many duels as his father had done before him. In 1624 he married Marie de Coulanges, a pious and gentle heiress belonging to a respectable *famille de robe*, as the French express it, and in 1626 was born their second and only surviving child, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, better known by her after-name of Marquise de Sévigné.

It gives one a curious impression of the manners and customs of the times to read how this, the last Baron de Chantal, after taking the sacrament with his wife within a year of his marriage, left the altar and went straight away in undress and in velvet slippers to act as second to his friend Boutteville, the most desperate duellist of the time, who had sent a messenger post-haste into the church to summon him to the Porte Saint Martin. It was then usual not only for principals but for seconds to

join in the fray. Boutteville and Rabutin de Chantal were obliged to fly for their lives after the encounter, for the Court, exasperated by the frequency of these murderous amusements, had passed stringent laws against duellists. The offence seems to have been condoned on this occasion; but in 1627 De Boutteville was taken and executed for a series of subsequent encounters. Chantal, who had been so intimately mixed up with his friend's *imbroglios*, fled to the island of Ré, where the Marquis de Toiras was beset by the English under Buckingham, and where the Baron de Chantal fell bravely in the combat, pierced by twenty-seven wounds. He was only thirty-one years of age, and his little daughter was scarcely more than one year old. His widow, who seems to have been much loved by him and by the saint, his mother, in her convent, caused his heart to be buried in the church of the Minimes at Paris, in the Place Royale, took her child, and returned to her father's, M. de Coulanges', house, which was in that same quiet quarter. The beautiful old place is still extant; the trees in its garden are green; the children play there as perhaps little Marie de Rabutin herself may have done with her young cousin, Emmanuel de Coulanges. It is said that the Marquis de Toiras, the former companion-in-arms of the Baron, tried in vain to win the widow's hand, but she had no thought of remarriage; her heart was buried with her husband's in the old church of the Minimes: and indeed, from all one hears of him, there must have been something singularly attractive in this hot-headed, handsome, gallant soldier. Sainte Chantal felt his death very deeply, and wrote many really beautiful things to her daughter-in-law; but when poor Marie de

Coulanges followed her husband to the grave, so absorbed was the holy lady in founding fresh convents, that, except for one or two more letters, all admirably expressed, she does not seem to have taken much interest in the fate of her little granddaughter. She requested her brother Fremyot, Archbishop of Bourges, to see after the child, who was by him given over to the care of her mother's relations.

Sainte Chantal entirely approved of the arrangement. Writing to the President Coulanges, she says :—

"The child will be happy, if God preserves you to her,—you and my suffering very dear sister,—to continue your pious and wise tuition. It is the truth that I love that child as I loved her father in all for Righteousness. I rejoice in the grace which will enable her to be confirmed at Easter."

When we remember how Sainte Chantal, in her enthusiasm for Righteousness, abandoned her young son, we cannot suppose that, from an earthly point of view, she can have been of much use to the little granddaughter. The child's early life was fated to be a sad one, for time after time death seems to have swept away the tender guardians who came about her. Our little Marie was orphaned a second time when her grandmother and grandfather died, and were carried in their turn to the church of the Minimes, where her mother was already lying, and her father's heart was buried.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUARDIAN AT LIVRY.

When the little orphan's fate had to be decided, a family council was called, at which, for the first time, we hear of Bussy de Rabutin, who afterwards played such an important part in Madame de Sévigné's history. The child was an heiress; several relations came forward to claim her; and among them Madame de Toulonjon, her father's sister, who proposed to place her in a convent forthwith. Bussy gave his vote for this lady; but happily for the world, which might have sustained a loss, and for the child herself, who was well fitted for the world, a different decision was come to. A guardian was formally appointed. This was the Abbé de Coulanges, Marie de Rabutin's maternal uncle, in whom she found, indeed, a lifelong friend, adviser, and protector. He was at that time but twenty-nine years of age, and she was somewhere about ten; but for half a century to come, these two lives were destined to run side by side in peaceful, tender affection. "Le Bienbon," she calls him; and if he was devoted to her, she, too, never failed in her faithful gratitude and affection towards the good man. She loved him; she loved Livry, the home to which he

took her, and where her early girlhood was passed. It was a place she returned to all her life, and always with pleasure. Livry was within a drive from Paris, all but enclosed by the forest of Bondy, and haunted by nightingales. Round about the abbey were pretty shaded gardens perfumed with honeysuckle. "I came here yesterday," she writes some forty years later, to her daughter, "and found the place in all the triumph of the month of May. The nightingale, the cuckoo, the thrush, have opened the spring-time in our forest. In the evening I walked there alone, and found all my sad thoughts, of which I will not speak to you. I have destined a portion of this afternoon to write to you from the garden, although I am bewildered by the three or four nightingales singing overhead."

Very little is known of Mademoiselle de Chantal's girlhood, but we get a pleasant glimpse in the Memoirs of Madame de la Guette, as quoted by M. Mesnard—"of a beauty to win all hearts, coming with Madame de Coulanges, and two other ladies of quality, to Livry every summer to breathe the fresh air."

Mademoiselle de Chantal's education was not entirely confined to the song of nightingales and the scent of honeysuckle. The Bienbon was rather a practical than a literary man, but he seems to have taken pains to select the very best and most highly esteemed masters for his young ward.[1] Ménage and Chapelain were her tutors.

[1] One of them was the well-known character Vadius, out of the 'Femmes Savantes,' the hero of the sonnet, otherwise Ménage, the learned man with the wonderful memory, about whom so many curious stories are told. Latin and philosophy he imbibed with his mother's milk; but, notwithstanding all the efforts of his teachers, he was not able to master music and dancing. He

They taught her literature, Italian, Spanish, and she was also made to read Virgil in the original—"in all the majesty of the text," as she herself says.

In the very first of all the many letters contained in M. de Monmerqué's big volumes, Mademoiselle de Sévigné, then "Chantal," as she signs herself without any other preamble, shows something of the thoughtlessness of youth in a reproach which she addresses to Ménage. He will not come and see her. . . . She entreats him to change his determination; if he will not come to-day, let it be to-morrow. Is he angry because she is going away? It is difficult to her to understand that, loving her as a friend, and regretting her, he should for that very reason treat her with coldness at the moment of parting. What a most extraordinary manner of behaving! says the young lady. Poor Ménage! if what biographers tell us is true, he was behaving in no very extraordinary manner. He adored his pupil, who, in those days, seems to have indulged in some

must have been of a sentimental disposition; and we read in the 'Biographie Générale' that when he attained the age of fifty he went to call on all the ladies he had been in the habit of visiting, and bade them farewell. "His works," says M. Fournel, "show a prodigious amount of reading; an ingenious mind; a vast if somewhat confused erudition. They are full of curious details of his contemporaries, and also of his own life, for he is personal in all he writes. He was a *protégé* of Gondi, the coadjutor, afterwards the Cardinal de Retz, and, like many *protégés*, he seems to have been in a constant state of discontent and grumbling. When his patron joined the Fronde he was most indignant. It cost him, he declared, 3000 livres a-year in perquisites. Chapelain, a very different sort of man—moderate, and more used to the ways of the world—tried again and again to make the peace between them. One of the complaints against Ménage was, that notwithstanding the remonstrances of Gondi's intendant, he sent a servant every day for five months to dine in the coadjutor's kitchen, and regularly borrowed a candle every evening for his own use.

girlish coquetry. In vain poor Ménage would get angry and go his way; his pupil used to call him back to her—"the friend of all friends," she writes to him. There is a cruel little story of a kiss she once gave him in company, "according to the fashion of the primitive church," she is said to have explained to the assembled guests. But this was when she was very young, before the pangs and disappointments of life had any meaning for her. If the young can inflict thoughtless wounds, they can bind them up as the old cannot do, who know the meaning of pain, and who shrink from approaching it.

Ménage was not the lovely Chantal's only adorer; there are many names still extant. Among others was Saint Pavin, a witty humpback, and lord of the manor at Livry. Bussy, both at this time and during her subsequent widowhood, was spoken of as a pretender to her hand. She is described later on as having an art which Bussy himself acknowledges,—that of turning her lover into a faithful friend. "It was a mixture of innocent coquetry, of goodness without prudery, and real kindness of heart, that at once maddened the poor lovers and disarmed their anger." Ménage, notwithstanding his romantic passion, always remained the confidant of Madame de Sévigné. "I have been your martyr," he said; "I am now your confessor."

Many years later, Madame de Sévigné, speaking of these early days, and of her granddaughter, little Pauline, whose square-tipped nose was, she declared, inherited from herself, modestly says, "Have I ever been as pretty as she is now? People tell me so." It is true that this beauty was not altogether regular; but those

yeux bigarrés, whose inequalities seemed to heighten their fascination, were blue and full of fire. She had fair hair, soft and abundant, and a dazzling complexion. Madame de la Fayette, who never flattered, writes to her: "The brilliancy of your mind so radiates through your features and your eyes, that not only does it reach us through our hearing, but dazzles our sight as well. Pleasures and diversions enhance your beauty when you are surrounded by them."

Thus we find Marie de Rabutin-Chantal at eighteen living in a romantic old *abbaye*, surrounded by woods all echoing with song, with a gentle elderly priest for her guardian and protector. She is an accomplished young lady moreover, an heiress, beautiful, the mistress of several languages; and being *une demoiselle à marier*, her establishment in life is now seriously discussed. As we have said, Bussy was one of the possible husbands thought of for her. No memoir of Madame de Sévigné would be complete without a mention of Bussy de Rabutin, her cousin, a few years her senior, her friend, enemy, playfellow. Their very quarrels tell the story of their two characters, which seem to complete each other in some curious fashion. The least lovable traits in Madame de Sévigné's nature she had in common with her kinsman, and must have inherited with him. But what in her was occasional and transient, formed in him the foundation of a hard and unscrupulous nature. Her extreme goodness and unselfish sympathy far more than counterbalanced any passing recklessness for the feelings of others when they clashed with the interests of those in whose life she was absorbed. With Bussy, on the contrary, the groundwork of his character

was selfishness, added to immoderate ambition, and a coarseness of fibre which seemed to prevent him from realising the unworthy life he was leading. His cousin was dazzled for a time. She was very proud of him until she found him out, and then she still cared for him. "We are nearly allied," she writes to him; "we are of the same blood, we please each other, we love each other." "*Un peu rustaudement*," he adds; and she also calls the link which binds them—that mixture of common blood and common wit—by the happy name of Rabutinage.

In these early days it is certain that Marie de Chantal took an interest in her cousin, whose father was anxious to see him married to her; and it is not known for certain why Bussy was not chosen for her husband. Perhaps the young man may have been afraid of her bright wit and clear-eyed judgment. Be that as it may, the Abbé de Coulanges was strangely at fault when he advocated the proposals of the Marquis de Sévigné, a *protégé* of Gondi, the coadjutor.

The Marquis's mother was an old friend. The young man himself was the inheritor of three centuries of noble blood, reckoning among his ancestors Montmorencys, Clissons, and Du Guesclins. He was rich, handsome, well dressed, witty, deemed agreeable by many. Perhaps the worthy Abbé may himself have been dazzled by so much good looks and fine clothes; or, what is far more likely, they may have made an impression on Mademoiselle de Chantal herself, who influenced her uncle. The Abbé willingly gave his consent to the marriage, which was, however, delayed from early spring to late summer by an encounter in the Bois de Boulogne,

where the Marquis, who had insulted a fellow-Breton, was badly wounded by a sword-thrust from his opponent.

The young couple were married finally on the 4th August 1644, at two o'clock in the morning, at the church of St Gervais and St Protais in Paris; and notwithstanding the inconvenient hour, there is a long list of the company present on this occasion, including Gondi himself.

CHAPTER IV.

M. LE MARQUIS AND MADAME LA MARQUISE.

FEW facts are known (except some indeed not very edifying) concerning the early married life of the young couple. Of Madame de Sévigné's tender admiration and affection for her husband there is no doubt. They seem to have led a gay and brilliant existence between Paris and their country-house in Brittany—made much of, feasted, entertained,—in their turn liberally entertaining their friends.

The world made them welcome,—and the world of those days was a brilliant, dazzling, and, to young and prosperous people, most delightful and enjoyable place, revolving smoothly, varied, polished, well fed, well dressed, well amused. The Sévignés used to frequent the neighbouring hotel of the Incomparable Arthenice—so Madame de Rambouillet's respectful adorers used to translate the name of Catherine, which they considered too commonplace for the mistress of such a Parnassus.

In those stately polished rooms Madame de Sévigné must have met all the names that we are accustomed to place in rows upon our book-shelves. Bossuet, Corneille, Voiture, Balzac, Ménage, and many more appear,—alive,

smiling, tapping their snuff-boxes, complimenting, discoursing agreeably, in the presence of a lovely and enthusiastic audience.

Madame de Sévigné herself is said to have made some stand against the exaggerations of that agreeable but highly wrought company, which, nevertheless, she seems to have enjoyed and frequented. She had too much natural humour to be entirely carried away by the literary fervours of the beautiful ladies,—although, long afterwards, she writes from the Rochers, her Breton home, "J'ai encore un petit reste de bel air qui me rend précieuse."[1] All the same, she detested what she called "tortillonage," and the "délicat des mauvaises ruelles," —neither of which expressions is to be rendered by "elaborate circumlocution" or "the false delicacy of vulgar coteries."

There is a celebrated and delightful chapter in Walckenaer's Life of Sévigné, describing one of those well-known meetings at the Hôtel Rambouillet. All the company are assembled in Madame de Rambouillet's bedroom, to hear the reading of a new piece by Corneille. A large screen partitions off a portion of the great room, and partially encloses a group, which is compared to a bed of flowers. It is a parterre of young and lovely women,—of ribbons, plumes, bright colours, suave voices, and perfumes; while abbés, courtiers, and poets stand around in attendance. The Princess de Condé, the Duchesses d'Aquillon, de Longueville, and de Chevreuse, the Marchionesses of Sablé and Sévigné, are present; so are Madame de la Vergne and her young daughter, our heroine's lifelong faithful friend, afterwards Countess

[1] "Some little remains of fine manners render me still a *précieuse*."

de la Fayette. There was also Madame de Fiesque, the wild companion of the Grande Mademoiselle. Near the bed sits Madame de Rambouillet herself; beside her a young abbess and a nun, both daughters of the house, who, from time to time, leave their holy retreats to revisit their mother and their home. Madame de Sévigné is examining some miniatures; by his bright-coloured cheeks and gay countenance it is easy to recognise her husband the Marquis, who is sitting at the feet of Mademoiselle du Vigean: "he speaks of Saint Evremond, and makes her laugh; he speaks of the Duc d'Enghien, and makes her blush."

The Duc d'Enghien was devotedly attached to Mademoiselle du Vigean. He was, however, married off by his family to some one else whom he could not love, and she ended her days as a Carmelite nun. In the crowd all about the room, a whole host of wits, writers, orators, are to be recognised: young Bossuet, l'Abbé Godeau—the whole book-shelf is there, bound in velvet and silk and gold-thread,—glittering, conversing, waiting for M. Corneille, and for M. de Voiture, who arrives first, dandling on his silken legs.

Not very far from the Hôtel de Rambouillet stands another great house, which still opens its doors to the public, to the wits and *beaux esprits* of our own time, who may, if they so choose, commune there with the voices of the past, gathering in sound and volume from the vaguest incoherence of early Merovingian times, to the bitter emphasis of those terrible days which followed the glorious reigns of the great Louis and his well-beloved grandson. This *hôtel*, which in Madame de Sévigné's day belonged to a respectable family, is now converted

into the Public Record Office of Paris, where he who runs may read; and it is impossible not to be struck by those writings on the wall, following so soon upon the noisy feast of wit and banter. There is Marie Antoinette's farewell to her children, interrupted by Sanson coming to carry her to her death; there is Charlotte Corday's firm writing and devoted confession to her Father. Literary rhymes, compliments, and criticisms sink into a whisper before such solemn voices as these.

But all these tragic times are yet unborn; and it is not with them that we are concerned, but with a humbler race, more resembling our own—women of the world, busy with trifles, with fancies, and finery;—some utterly frivolous, others with warm hearts for their own home treasures, though somewhat forgetful of the troubles outside. A truer heart never beat than that of the handsome, fair-haired young lady, with the dazzling complexion and laughing mouth, and the sparkling eyes of different hue: had she lived in later times, she might perhaps have shown what generous constancy was also hers.

The young couple had not been very long married before a secret became known, which the poor young lady had done her best to keep to herself. This was the serious subject for complaint which she had against her husband—his neglect and his infidelity. Knowing what her nature was, one may guess at the sorrow of her early life, although she rarely speaks of it. Once indeed she writes of "l'abîme" from which her uncle rescued her—an abyss indeed, into which at one time she must have seemed sinking deeper day by day; indifference, extravagance, infidelity to her tender, faithful,

and responsible mind, all this must have been a heavy load to bear in silence. Sévigné did not try to conceal his indifference for his wife. He is said to have told her that perhaps others might find her agreeable, but that she could never charm him. He said this openly too; and many of the unscrupulous people by whom she was surrounded now attempted to pay court to her themselves, thinking that natural resentment must needs make her an easy prey. Her free, open humour, her natural coquetry, blinded them to her good sense, and her clear perception of right and wrong. Her husband's conduct was too flagrant for her to be able to esteem him, but she never ceased to love him; while he, on the contrary, esteemed her without love.

"He loved everywhere," said Bussy-Rabutin, speaking of him, "but never anything so amiable as his own wife." Bussy, among the rest, did not hesitate to do his utmost to ingratiate himself with the young Marquise, who daily fascinated him more and more ever since she had been beyond his reach. He himself had been married off by his anxious parents to another cousin—a daughter of that aunt, Madame de Toulonjon, Sainte Chantal's youngest, and now only surviving, child; but his marriage does not seem to have interfered with his assiduities.

It was in the autumn of 1646 that Madame de Sévigné's own daughter, "the prettiest girl in France," was born; and we read of the christening: "Françoise Marguerite de Sévigné, daughter of Messire Henri de Sévigné, Lord of the Manor of the Rochers, of Bodegat, of Buron, &c., and of Marie de Rabutin, living in the Rue des Lions; the godfather was the Bishop of Chalons,

Jacques de Neuchèze, who had married the couple some two years before; the godmother, Dame Claude Marguerite de Gondi." This motherhood, this new deep interest, dawning at a time when all other natural hopes and trusts had so cruelly failed her, must indeed have flooded the young mother's aching empty heart with strange new happiness and hope; and this may in part account for the passionate tenderness which, all her life long, Marie de Sévigné gave to this her first-born child.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ'S COUSIN.

THE parents seem to have spent the winter after the little daughter's birth in Paris; and in March 1648 a second child, a son, was born to Madame de Sévigné. The latter event took place in Brittany, at the Rochers, the paternal home. A letter to Bussy, already a widower, "the father of daughters only," is dated from here. It playfully reproaches him for his long silence and indifference, and threatens him with the coming vengeance of the little new-born boy. In the autumn of this same year, we find the Sévigné family comfortably established at the Abbaye of Ferrières, where Bussy is also staying, and celebrating the merits of a certain Maître Crochet, the cook of the hospitable Jacques de Neuchèze, who is entertaining them all. The flavour of Maître Crochet's soup steams appetisingly still at this distance of time: Bussy declares no other broth is possible after it. Bussy himself must have been glad of a little country air and quiet retirement at this particular season, for he had been burning his fingers, and behaving in a way which was greatly reprobated, even in those days when so much was tolerated. The incident is perhaps

not one of the least curious of all the many curious incidents which were regarded as commonplace events in those very uncommonplace times. Bussy's wife, Gabrielle de Toulonjon, having only left him daughters, he wished for a son to perpetuate his name, and determined to marry again. The modest cousin desired youth, beauty, and, above all, a very large portion to satisfy his expensive habits, and to enable him to keep up his position at Court. Through a certain Le Bocage, whom he had met at dinner at the Grand Prior, his uncle's, house, he chanced to hear of a lovely young widow, angelic both in disposition and fortune (for she was a millionaire), who seemed to Bussy the very person he should wish to promote to the dignity of Comtesse de Bussy-Rabutin. Le Bocage did not know her personally, but he introduced Bussy to a certain priest called Father Clement, who, for a consideration, enabled them to see the lady at her devotions one day. The Count was charmed by her appearance, her youth, her piety, and her equipage, which was waiting at the church door, and which showed her to be a person of consequence.

Father Clement, for a further consideration, seems to have informed Bussy that his lovely penitent was less absorbed in her pious mourning than she appeared to be; and the Count, who thought it could only be an honour to a lady of the middle classes to be connected with so noble a house as his, summarily determined to carry the lovely widow off and marry her without more ado. Hearing that she was to drive on a certain day from Issy to the Mount Valerien, he made his arrangements, placed relays of horses at certain places along the road, secured the co-operation of several friends, who assembled

a small company of cavaliers, followed by their servants, all armed and mounted.

Madame de Miramion (this was the lady's name,—she became afterwards celebrated for her many good deeds and charities) was not alone: she was accompanied by her mother-in-law, and, according to the custom of the day, by two waiting-women and an old valet. They had reached St Cloud, when suddenly their carriage is stopped, two cavaliers appear at either window, tearing down the leather curtains. The poor lady, dreadfully alarmed, tries in vain to drive them away, beating with her bag, and screaming for help; there is no one to interfere. The armed men force the coachman to retrace his steps, and to bring the carriage into the Bois de Boulogne, which is not far off. The poor lady defends herself in vain,—her screams, her tears, her prayers, have no effect; Bussy, indeed, primed by Father Clement and his own vanity, can scarcely believe in them, and considers it all a pretence,—a comedy acted for the mother-in-law's benefit. We are told that once, in her despair, Madame de Miramion suddenly flung herself through the doorway into the brushwood by the roadside; but she was immediately picked up and replaced in her seat, all covered with scratches and blood, her mother-in-law and the elder waiting-woman having been meanwhile forcibly expelled from the coach. The poor lady's wild cries and appeals after they leave the wood are explained to the bystanders as those of a mad woman, conveyed by order of the Court to be shut up; and, indeed, the poor thing's appearance, her torn dress, dishevelled hair, her scratched and bleeding face, and wild looks, only serve too well to bear out this assertion.

When they arrive at their destination, Madame de Miramion refuses to eat or rest, and only threatens to kill herself. Bussy, much surprised, complains that he had been assured she was a lamb, but he finds her a raging lion. Although he approached her with every respect, and in his most fascinating manner, she only replied to his advances, by a solemn oath before heaven, that under no circumstances whatever would she consent to marry him. He was in some perplexity, and his friends were urging him to let the lady go, when their advice was suddenly confirmed by the news that 600 men from Sens were on their way to besiege the castle and set Madame de Miramion free. The mother-in-law had not been inactive, and had raised the country.

Thirty-six years afterwards, some important lawsuit of Bussy's depended upon the decision of a near relation of Madame de Miramion's. The suitor actually went on the strength of this first introduction to bespeak her good word on his behalf; and the beautiful and most forgiving lady, now very fat, very placid, and renowned for her good deeds, agreed to his wishes, and exerted herself warmly in his favour.

We now come to troubled and complicated times. Madame de Sévigné was in Paris in the December of 1648, and D'Ormesson, her kinsman (who was afterwards so good an advocate when Fouquet was tried for his life), was with her in the "lantern" of the Courts of Justice listening to a trial, when the deputies burst into the great hall demanding a General Assembly. This was the beginning of the Fronde, that first rising of the people against the Ministry and the Crown.

When Paris was no longer deemed a safe residence for the young king, the Court left in the night and retired to St Germains. The Prince de Condé followed its fortunes; and Bussy, who had been more occupied all this time in trying to make love to Madame de Sévigné than with politics, now followed his chief, although grumbling loudly, and greatly discontented at the way in which he had been used by him.

Chance thus threw him into the opposite camp to the Sévignés, whose near relationship to Gondi and other Liberals made them partisans of the disaffected cause. Sévigné himself followed the Duc de Longueville into Normandy, where a rising against Mazarin was attempted, and the principal feat recorded of him on this occasion is, that he had the honour of making the duke laugh. Longueville seems to have made Mazarin laugh, if we are to believe contemporaneous records, so small were the results of his many preparations and *fanfaronnades*. Madame de Sévigné remained in Paris with her young children, writing letters to Bussy, who was keeping a sulky guard at St Denis, and who passed the time in this sentimental correspondence with the enemy.

A sort of peace between the rival parties was made in 1649. It was rather a cautious neutrality than a permanent peace. Not long afterwards everybody was taken by surprise when the great Condé himself, whose haughty and domineering character had incurred the Queen Regent's bitter displeasure, was arrested, together with his brother Conti, and by the help of Gondi the coadjutor, the princes were shut up in Vincennes. Bussy, who always found himself on the wrong side,

remained in Paris, in order to gain time, and pretended to be entirely absorbed in the details of his second marriage with Louise de Rouville, another cousin, to whom he was united in the month of May.

Meanwhile Condé's partisans were not idle. His wife had assembled a force at Montrond, and raised Bordeaux with the help of Bouillon and La Rochefoucauld; and she now wrote an urgent summons to Bussy to join her, which summons he reluctantly obeyed. There were now no less than five different parties in France all fighting, intriguing, and combining love, war, self-interest in their curious diversities. The Old Fronde declared itself for the Queen Regent, for the King, and the Court, but maintained its hatred to Mazarin: to this cause the Sévignés belonged. The partisans of the princes were called the New Fronde.

Mazarin, says Walckenaer, founded his ambition on the re-establishment of the royal power and the greatness of France. Condé's dream, on the contrary, was the overthrow of Mazarin, and his own consequent ascendancy. But notwithstanding all opposition and the many plots against his life and liberty, the Minister, backed by the Queen, went on his way undaunted until he thought the time had come for Louis to assert his own authority, We all know the pictures of the young king in full hunting costume, with his felt hat on his head, entering the hall of deliberation, followed by his suite, and haughtily commanding that in future his parliament should abstain from all comment upon the administration of his kingdom. It is for the historian, not for the compiler of a hand-book, to evolve a moral out of all these complications. Poor Bussy gained nothing in

this struggle, and one is really sorry for his disappointment.

He writes to Madame de Sévigné from Montrond in July 1650: "I have at last declared myself for M. le Prince, *ma belle cousine*, not without great reluctance, for I am serving against my king in the interests of a prince who does not care for me. But it is true that his condition fills me with pity: I shall therefore serve him as if he loved me while he is a prisoner; and if ever he is set free I will give him back my commission, and leave him at once to return to my duty. What do you say to these sentiments? Tell me at once if you do not find them noble and worthy? When I think that last year we were both on opposite sides, and that we are still opposed, although we have both changed places, I think we are playing at the game of *prisoner's base*." Then he goes on to say that it is a fine thing for a woman of twenty to be mixed up with politics: the celebrated Madame de Chevreuse had not begun earlier. "However, your side is always the best," he concludes, "for you do not leave Paris, and I am despatched from Paris to Montrond, and not a little afraid that at last I may be sent from Montrond to the devil!"

The celebrated Duchesse de Chevreuse was no longer twenty, but she still had extraordinary influence, and was not yet tired of intriguing. She seemed to have interests in every faction. With the princes, to one of which she wished to marry her daughter: with Mazarin, whom she humoured, hoping for help in the repayment of certain sums owing to her by the state, she kept a firm influence over the Queen, from the habit of long

years. She also intrigued secretly with Gondi, with whom she had still more complicated relations.

The Sévignés, the coadjutor's kinsfolk and firm allies, we read, entertained her at a banquet, described by Loret, the chronicler of those days. It seems to have been a brilliant and noisy feast. Many candles are recorded as having shone, as well as beautiful ladies. There was noise and music; there were ortolans; soup was spilled, and a silver dish was stolen on the occasion.

It cannot have been very long after this that Sévigné, finding his wife's presence a constant reproach and restraint, carried her off to Brittany, and left her with her children at his old chateau of the Rochers, returning himself to Paris, where he resumed his foolish and dissipated ways. She did not see Paris again for many months.

Everything was changed for her when she returned thither once more. One of the saddest dates of her life was approaching. Years afterwards, as an old woman, she writes: "I have only retained in my memory two dates—those of the year of my birth and of my marriage; but, without augmenting their number, I shall in future forget the year in which I was born, which now saddens and overwhelms me, and I will put in its place the date of my widowhood, and the commencement of an existence which has been tolerably peaceful and happy, without brilliance, without distinction, but which may end in a more Christian spirit than if it had been stirred by great events,—and that, in truth, is what matters most of all."

CHAPTER VI.

WIDOWS' WEEDS.

THERE is something very tragi-grotesque in the death of the husband of Madame de Sévigné. He was, as we have seen, handsome, well-born, faithless, rude, dissipated, and alone seemed insensible to the sweetness of the young wife who loved him. Among others Sévigné chose his wife's cousin, Bussy de Rabutin, as his confidant; and Bussy used to lose no time in repeating these confidences to Madame de Sévigné herself, who sometimes reproached her husband, but without effect. We have heard him complain of his wife, that she did not charm him. The well-known Ninon de l'Enclos charmed him, alas! and some whose influence was even more fatal to the foolish young man; for Ninon, with all her faults, was a generous woman, and scorned to fleece those whom she had first bewitched. Others were less scrupulous, and among these last was a certain wicked little Madame de Gondran, married, so M. Paul Mesnard tells us in his excellent biography of Madame de Sévigné, to a sort of Georges Dandin of a husband. "La belle Lolo," as her acquaintance called her, was as interested as she was beautiful, only caring for finery, flattery, and

fashion. Among her many caprices, we hear of her insisting upon wearing a certain pair of diamond ear-rings at a ball, which ear-rings happened to be heirlooms belonging to Mademoiselle de Chevreuse. The Marquis, who could refuse no request of Madame de Gondran's, was reduced to lying to obtain them, and pretended that he wanted to borrow the jewels for Mademoiselle de la Vergne, his wife's great friend, the most respectable and well-conducted of women. People were not a little surprised when they recognised the celebrated brilliants dancing at the ball in the fair Lolo's ears. To help her friend's husband out of a most unpleasant dilemma, Mademoiselle de la Vergne consented to take the transaction on herself, and went to thank Mademoiselle de Chevreuse for the loan of the precious ornaments. Sévigné's attentions were unfortunately not only confined to *borrowing*, for the benefit of Madame de Gondran. He bestowed most royal sums out of his own and his wife's fortunes to gratify her endless fancies. Madame de Sévigné, against the advice of her faithful uncle De Coulanges (who had some short time before insisted upon a legal division of goods between the married couple), had advanced to her husband, not without difficulty, the sum of 50,000 pieces, which were all rapidly running through the fair Lolo's grasping fingers, when an unforeseen incident brought about a tragedy, and put an end to the Marquis's ill-starred generosity. A certain Lager, a Gascon, had happened to make some insolent jokes about Madame de Gondran and her doings, which came to the knowledge of the Marquis, who immediately proposed to chastise Lager with a stick, according to the simple custom of the time. Lager

prudently ran away from a not undeserved beating, but nevertheless determined to revenge the affront when he could do so without inconvenience to his bones. Chance threw him into the company of a certain Chevalier d'Albret, a brother of the better-known Marshal d'Albret, a high-spirited young man—"qui tuait très bien son monde," says the French chronicler. Albret had himself once been a victim of the fair Lolo's, but of late, not a little to his indignation, had found her door constantly shut when he called. Lager maliciously assured Albret that this insult had been instigated by Sévigné, who had not only persuaded Madame de Gondran to desire her servants to forbid Albret the house, but had also openly spoken of him in the most contemptuous manner. A meeting was immediately demanded by the indignant Chevalier; and although Sévigné, brought face to face with Albret, emphatically denied what Lager had laid to his charge, he added that he was only accustomed to justify himself sword in hand, and that the duel must therefore take place. D'Albret replied that he had not come all this long distance to waste his time. We are told that the two then embraced and fell to.

At first the advantage seemed to be with Sévigné, but presently becoming excited, he pressed his adversary too hotly. Albret parried the stroke. As Sévigné precipitated himself forward, his opponent's sword ran right through his body, and he fell. He was brought back to Paris, the surgeons pronounced his wound mortal, and he died the next day, very loath to go. He was but twenty-seven years of age.

The wife he had used so badly and the unconscious husband of Madame de Gondran seem to have been the

only two people who sincerely mourned for him. The poor young widow came up hurriedly from her distant Rochers when the sad news reached her. Gondran came in tears to the funeral. It is said that Madame de Sévigné went to Madame de Gondran and fetched away her husband's picture and a lock of his hair, in return for some letters which Madame de Gondran had written, and which she had only to blush for. So died the poor young Marquis, a man of honour, agreeable, handsome, and witty in conversation; but he was egotistical, for ever occupied with his own concerns, unable to respond to the calls and interests of others—and so it happened that, young as he was, his companions had already wearied of him, and that he was left with so few real friends. His widow went back to her home, where she mourned him and hid herself away tending her children, and, in her turn, was watched and cared for, both spiritually and temporally, by her faithful guardian and uncle, the Abbé de Coulanges.

It was some time before she could again meet her friends. She lived quietly, paying off the debts her husband had incurred. Two years afterwards, when she had begun once more to go into the world, she suddenly fainted dead away in some company where she had been spending an evening. She had seen D'Albret, the slayer of her husband, coming in at a doorway.

CHAPTER VII.

LIBATIONS.

NONE of her own contemporaries ever paid Madame de Sévigné a prettier compliment than Sainte Beuve, in the preface to his celebrated volume of celebrated women. "It is impossible to speak of women," he says, "without first putting one's self into good humour by the thought of Madame de Sévigné. With us moderns this process takes the place of one of those invocations or libations which the ancients were used to offer up to the pure source of grace."

In Madame de Sévigné's own day such compliments and libations were so abundant, that we are told it was almost considered in the light of an insult if a young and charming lady was not addressed in language of exaggerated devotion, amounting almost to love-making, —otherwise, says one of her biographers, we might almost wonder at her patience with Ménage and his love-poems, with gouty Costar's gallant declarations, and the long-winded protestations which she had to encounter on every side. We hear of other more brilliant aspirants to her favour. There is a quarrel recorded which took place in the *ruelle* of her own bedroom between a Rohan

and a Tonquedec, each wishing to be preferred; and besides these, we read of the Count du Lude, of Conti, of Fouquet, and even of the great Turenne himself, all admiring her and courting her smiles. Bussy, the unscrupulous, did not hesitate to encourage the more powerful of these aspirants, and reproached his cousin with her coldness and insensibility.

Here is a charming description of Madame de Sévigné written about this time, which is quoted by all her biographers. It is the Abbé Arnauld,[1] the brother of the well-known Mère Angélique of Port Royal, who is writing, in 1657, six years after the Marquis de Sévigné's death.

"It seems to me," he says, "that I still see her before my eyes as she appeared to me the first time I ever had the honour of beholding her, when she arrived, sitting in the depths of her great chariot, that was thrown open wide. On either side of her sat the young gentleman her son, and the young lady her daughter,—all three such as those whom the poets have described. They recalled to me Latona with the young Apollo and the young Diana, so indescribable a charm radiated from all of them—from the mother and the children."

Pomponne, who was also present on this occasion, admired the beauty of the two children. "M. de Pomponne remembers you as a little girl," the mother writes long after. "You were peeping behind a pane in my uncle De Sévigné's house, as lovely as an angel. Your brother was there too, as beautiful as yourself. You said you were a prisoner,—a princess driven from your father's Court."

[1] The Abbé was the youngest and twentieth child of his parents. He was uncle to Pomponne, Louis the Fourteenth's Minister.

Here is also Mademoiselle de Scudery's description of Madame de Sévigné, under the name of "Clélie," in one of those mysterious romances which created so great an excitement at the time. People were new to novels and novel-writing, and thrilled more easily than we do over the loves and sorrows of imaginary princes and princesses. Princess Clarinte shall speak for herself.

"Princess Clarinte has blue eyes, full of life and expression. She dances with marvellous grace, and charms all hearts. Her voice is sweet and melodious, and she sings in a passionate manner. She reads a great deal, although she has few pretensions to being learned. She has learnt the Italian language, and she prefers certain little Italian songs, which please her better than those of her own country. She has found means (without either being severe or misanthropical) to keep a good reputation in a great Court, where she receives all the honest people, and inspires affection in all hearts that are capable of feeling it. This same pleasant temper, which becomes her so well, and diverts others as well as herself, enables her to make friends with many who, if they dared, would be glad to pass for her lovers. She says, laughing, that she has never been in love with anything but her own good name, and that she watches it with jealousy. When it is necessary, she can leave the world and the Court, and enjoy country life with the same tranquillity as if she had been born and bred in the woods. She returns to us gay and beautiful, as if she had never left Paris. She wins the hearts of all women, as well as those of men. She writes as she speaks—that is to say, in the most courteous and agreeable manner. I have never seen so much charm united with so much light of intellect, such innocence and virtue. Nobody else has ever better known the art of being graceful without affectation, witty without malice, gay without folly, modest without constraint, and virtuous without severity."

Madame de Sévigné only laughed when she read one

of these descriptions, and said that to be so perfect was not in human nature. One of her correspondents—the courteous Costar—assures her that those who had never understood the beauty of her mind—its grace, its depth, its gentleness—might perhaps think so, and that she herself wore a certain bandage of modesty across the eyes which prevented her from seeing clearly.

Here is one more sketch of our Marquise from the pen of the Abbé de Montreuil, which a friend has rendered into English. It will be seen that the original has not lost by its change.[1]

To the Marquise de Sévigné playing at blindman's-buff. Translated from Abbé de Montreuil.

"Your right is to enthrall,—
You charm in every way;
But surely, most of all,
You charm us all to-day.
Your blindfold eyes we see,
And deem you 'Love'—none other:
Your blindfold eyes we free,
And lo! you are 'Love's mother.'"

—Hallam Tennyson.

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[1] "De toutes les façons vous avez droit de plaire,
Mais surtout vous savez nous charmer en ce jour:
Voyant vos yeux bandés, on vous prend pour l'Amour;
Les voyant découverts, on vous prend pour sa mère."

CHAPTER VIII.

PEN AND INK.

For many years Madame de Sévigné's letters do not seem to have been preserved with any care by her friends, whatever compliments they may have paid her, and however glad they may have been to hear from her. With the exception of a few to her cousin Bussy, one or two to Ménage, and the well-known and affecting letters to Pomponne describing the trial of Fouquet, there is little of her correspondence still extant outside the great tide of written love, advice, maternal anxieties, which began to flow from Paris in the autumn of 1671 to the south, where her daughter, Madame de Grignan's married lot was cast.

One packet, indeed, of Madame de Sévigné's letters (which has since disappeared), concerning her cousin La Trousse's interests, was unfortunately preserved for a time, and cost her no small anxiety and annoyance. The papers had been put away by Fouquet, the great *surintendant*, in a casket containing many other far less creditable epistles, — love-letters, bargains, requests, promises, from the various Court beauties in his pay. When the crash came, and the king's long-smothered

indignation burst forth — when Fouquet himself was suddenly arrested and taken to the Bastille—when his wonder-palace and art-treasures were seized and scattered to the winds,—this packet was carried off among the rest of his papers to the king's own cabinet. Louis was able to read for himself new proof of the *surintendant's* long-suspected duplicity. The chapters in the second volume of Walckenaer's history of Madame de Sévigné, describing the great Minister's rise and fall, are well worth the attention of those who are interested in the history of those days, when life and emotion were so vivid, so rapid and impetuous.

As one reads Walckenaer's pages, it seems as if there must have been more sound in the people's voices then than now, brighter colours in the air, eyes more brilliant, the interests more noisy and unaffected, the characters and features more marked. This splendid *surintendant* rises and sets, a dazzling figure. There is something which strikes one's imagination in the story of the dying Mazarin with his last breath desiring the young king to send for Fouquet, to respect his advice, to utilise his wonderful powers, at the same time warning him not to trust him entirely,—to keep a scrutinising watch upon his schemes and accounts. Then we read of Colbert secretly at work, apparently a subordinate, but in reality a powerful enemy, tracking Fouquet's splendid steps, disentangling the intentional confusion of his lavish accounts, and silently laying before the king, day by day, the key to Fouquet's complicated schemes. Unconscious, Fouquet meanwhile pursued his aims, buying the goodwill of courtiers, seizing on every vacant post, extending his power. He had grand ideas. The glory of

France was dear to him; his policy abroad was worthy of a great kingdom; he was unscrupulous, but generous and honourable at the same time. How he was loved by his friends, how true they remained to him at the hour of his most desperate straits, is a matter of history. Every school-girl has learnt La Fontaine's touching ode to his fallen patron; and Madame de Sévigné's letters (those outside, not inside the casket) also tell us, in most unmistakable language, how true and sincere was the feeling of affection he inspired.

Madame de Sévigné's distress at the scandal which had got abroad concerning her letters to the *surintendant* was great. She writes to Ménage to beg that he will take every opportunity to contradict any reports that may have been spread, when it was known that among this venial correspondence some of her writing had been discovered.

And then again, in answer to her old tutor, who replied that he had already taken up arms in her cause, she says:—

"I do not forgive myself that, instead of writing to you as I did, I did not send you straight away a letter of thanks. I now pay my debt, and beg you to believe that I am as grateful as I ought to be for your goodness. I send a compliment to Mademoiselle de Scudery for the same reason."

She thus writes to M. de Pomponne:—

"Could you have ever imagined that my poor letters, all full of M. de la Trousse's marriage, should have been put away so mysteriously? I am very much concerned by the necessity in which I am placed of trying, perhaps in vain, to justify myself to a thousand persons who will never believe the truth. You, I think, will understand the suffering

this causes a heart such as mine. I conjure you to explain to every one all that you know to be true. I cannot have too many friends on this occasion."

Three years later, Madame de Sévigné, exonerated by the king himself, was again writing to M. de Pomponne, who was then in a sort of honourable exile, on account of his friendship for Fouquet. Perhaps none of her letters is more graphic and interesting than these which tell of Fouquet's trial, and describe his courageous bearing in adversity with all the eloquent admiration and generous partisanship of a sincere friend. No quality is more admirable in Madame de Sévigné than this fidelity of heart. She is true through good report and ill report, uninfluenced by ebbing fortunes, unshaken by changing opinions; and this, in a person of such vivid imagination, is no small tribute to the loyal affections which kept her steady through all the chances of life to those upon whom she had once bestowed her friendship.

"To-day, Monday, Nov. 17th, 1664, M. Fouquet was examined for the second time. He sat down without ceremony, as he did on the first occasion, and the chancellor again desired him to put up his hand and to take his oath. He replied that he had already given the reasons which must prevent his taking the oath. Thereupon the chancellor rushed at once into a great discourse to prove the legitimate powers of the Chamber—that the king had established it, &c.

"M. Fouquet answered that often things were done by authority which afterwards, upon reflection, did not appear to be quite advisable.

"The chancellor interrupted him. 'What! you then say that the king abuses his power?'

"M. Fouquet replied, 'You say so, sir, not I. That is not what I think; and I wonder that, in the condition in which I am, you should wish to oppose me to the king.'"

All her letters were nominally addressed to Pomponne, but she knew that he passed them on to his father, to his brother, to the Chateau de Guénegaud, which was not far distant from his own home, and that her bulletin carried news to the little coterie of faithful friends and well-wishers. Her frankness, her courage, her fidelity, give a *heart* to the story of reckless licence and profusion, of vindictive persecution and revenge.

On the 20th of the same month she writes:—

"M. Fouquet was questioned upon the affair of *the gold pieces* this morning. He answered very well: several of the judges bowed to him. The chancellor made this a subject of reproach, and said it was not the custom. As he was returning by the arsenal on foot for exercise, M. Fouquet asked who were those workmen he perceived. He was told that they were people altering the basin of a fountain. He went up to them and gave his advice; and then turning to D'Artagnan (the Hedzoff of those days), 'Do you wonder that I should interfere? I was formerly considered clever at these sort of things.'"

21*st*.—" . . . M. Fouquet was rendered very impatient by certain objections made, which seemed to him ridiculous. He showed his impatience too much, and answered with a haughtiness which gave displeasure. He will correct himself, for this manner is not good; but in the truth, patience fails one at times, and it seems to me I should do as he does."

Some days after she writes:—

"M. Fouquet entered the Chamber this morning, and was interrogated about the city rates. He was very badly

attacked, and defended himself very well, although this is one of the most dangerous places of the whole affair.

"I know not what good angel warned him that he had been too proud. He corrected himself of his pride to-day, as the others corrected themselves of their bows to him."

2*d December*.—"Our dear and unfortunate friend spoke for two hours this morning, so well that several could not help openly admiring him. M. Renard, among the rest, said, 'This man is incomparable; he never spoke so well in Parliament,—he never was more collected.' It was again on the subject of the £24,000. . . . 'God grant that my last letter may tell you that which I ardently desire. Farewell, dear sir. Ask our solitary [Arnauld] to pray to God for our poor friend."

She describes a little incident which is slight enough in itself, but which enlists the reader's sympathy.

"L'Abbé d'Effiat bowed to Fouquet in court. Fouquet said, 'Sir, I am your very humble servant,' as he returned the bow with that fixed and smiling expression we all know so well."

Meanwhile the queen-mother is dying, and the trial is postponed. Madame de Sévigné breaks off her account of Fouquet, and describes the administration of the viaticum.

"It was the most magnificent and the saddest thing in the world to see the king and all the Court with tapers, and a thousand torches, going to fetch and to carry back the holy sacrament. It was received with an infinity of lights. The queen made an effort to raise herself, and took it with a devotion which melted all the bystanders to tears. It was not without difficulty that she had been brought to this: only the king could make her hear reason; to every one else she said she would communicate, but not for death."

Madame de Sévigné returns to her prisoner:—

9th December.—"I assure you these days are very long, and uncertainty is an overwhelming thing. . . . In the depths of my heart I have a little shred of hope,—I know not whence it comes or whither it goes: it is not enough to let me sleep in peace. I was speaking yesterday to Madame du Plessis of all this business. I can only meet those with whom I can speak of it, and who are with me in feeling. She hopes as I do, without knowing the reason why."

17th December.—"You are weary, my poor friend; we also are weary. I was sorry to have told you that judgment was to be given on Tuesday, for, not hearing any news, you must have imagined all was lost, notwithstanding which, we still retain all our hopes. Every one is interested in this great affair—speaking of little else, reasoning, drawing conclusions; people count chances on their fingers, melt with pity, with apprehension, hoping, hating, admiring; some of us are sad, some of us are overwhelmed. In short, my dear sir, the state in which we live is an extraordinary one, but the resignation and courage of our dear sufferer are almost more than human."

One of Madame de Sévigné's biographers says, that in the interest a woman takes in a man who has loved her, there is always something of love. It may be so; but a love which does not shrink from comforting the disgrace of an old friend is not one to be ashamed of. Here is the outburst of warm-hearted sympathy:—

Saturday.—"Thank God, sir, and praise Him, our poor friend is safe. Thirteen votes were on M. d'Ormesson's side, and nine on that of St Hilaire. I am so happy,—I am beside myself."

On the following Sunday she writes again:—

"I was dying for fear another than I should have given

you the pleasure of hearing the good news. My courier does not seem to have hurried, although he told me when he started that he should not rest before reaching Livry. However, he assures me he was first to reach you. How comforting this news must have been to you! What inconceivable pleasure do the moments bring, in which our hearts and minds are relieved from such terrible suffering!

"It will be long before I recover from the happiness I felt all yesterday. In truth, it was too complete,—I could hardly contain myself."

It would be easy to go on multiplying extracts from this vivid and lifelike description; but this is the story of Madame de Sévigné, and not of Fouquet, the great *surintendant*. The end of the trial is well known. Sainte Beuve quotes Pelisson's[1] noble outburst in his chief's defence, and La Fontaine's touching line, "Et c'est être innocent que d'être malheureux;" but in the eyes of Louis XIV., to be unfortunate was to be guilty. As we read in our letters, the first joy of Fouquet's friends over his supposed safety was great. Banishment for life and confiscation of property seemed scarcely a punishment after their many apprehensions. But they had not sufficiently taken into consideration the royal prerogative, by which Louis was able to add lifelong solitary imprisonment to disgrace, confiscation, and exile; and Fouquet, at fifty years of age, separated from his wife and children and aged mother, was carried off by the king's command to the castle of Pignerolles, on the confines of Piedmont. Just before his death, after a captivity of sixteen years, he was allowed to see his wife once more, and it was even hoped that his broken health

[1] Pelisson was also sent to the Bastille, and also remembered by a faithful friend, Mademoiselle de Scudery.

might somewhat relax the severity of his treatment; but he died before any change had been made. Time had passed, and the keenness of his friends' sympathy had been blunted, but he was still remembered with warm affection and regard. Whatever his faults may have been, says Sainte Beuve, Fouquet had in him the *true fibre of humanity:* he could touch its spring in others, and they would answer to him.

Fouquet being disposed of, his nymphs dispersed in tears (*pleurez Nymphes de Vaux*), his music silenced, his splendours forgotten, it seems time that other festivities should distract us. While the cheerless years pass wearily for the prisoner, we may read dazzling accounts of the splendours of the Court, of masks, of triumphal receptions, of varied entertainments, of marriages and pageants; of a young and brilliant Court brimful of life, of high spirits and amusements and self-indulgence. The Queen Regent was dead, after horrible torture heroically endured: only young people were left to make merry.

CHAPTER IX.

RABUTINAGE.

During all this time, while Fouquet's letters carried so much talk and scandal, in which Madame de Sévigné herself was not spared, no one took her part more warmly than her second cousin, Bussy de Rabutin, whose testimony in her favour is the more to be relied upon because, for some years past, a coldness had existed between them. They had been warm friends. It was Madame de Sévigné herself who, as we have said, invented the word *Rabutinage*, to express the family ties and the sympathy which bound them together. "I have been touched by your letters" (to the king), she says, writing to Bussy. "It seems to me that they should have the same effect upon our master as upon me; and yet he is not called Rabutin, as I am." In this same letter, written in 1668, she recapitulates the causes of their bitter quarrel. It was an old one, which had begun ten years before, when Madame de Sévigné was a young widow, and her children children still. The quarrel was about money. Bussy had asked his cousin for a loan, which was delayed; and in his irritation he had published a satirical portrait of her, not only ridicul-

ing her virtues, but accusing her of vice under a prudish exterior. This calumny was printed, not by Bussy himself, but by a woman to whom he had given it. Madame de Sévigné felt it keenly. Ten years passed before the cousins were really reconciled.

"I see," she writes, in a retrospective letter of expostulation and forgiveness, "that you are ill informed of the news from these parts, my cousin. Learn then from me that it is not the custom here to accuse me of faithlessness to my friends. I have many other faults, as Madame de Bouillon says, but not that one, and you may erase this count from the list of my failings."

Then she reverts to the original quarrel:—

"We are near to each other," she says, "and of the same blood; we suit each other, we like each other; we are interested in one another's fortunes. You spoke to me of advancing money to you upon the ten thousand pieces you were to receive from M. de Chalon's succession. You say that I refused you; I say I lent you the money: for you well know, and our friend Corbinelli is my witness, that in my heart I only wished to comply with your request; and while we were seeking the consent of Neuchèze to allow our names to be inserted in the deeds, in order to be eventually repaid, impatience seized you."

It is easy to imagine that the Bienbon, a methodical and orderly man, might insist upon such due formalities, for Bussy's character was in itself no guarantee for repayment. Bussy the suspicious declared, however, that it was all a pretext for refusing. He could not wait, moreover; the money was wanted for his equipment before starting on a campaign. He turned to another woman, Madame de Montglas, who had apparently no Abbé to restrain her, and who pawned her diamonds and

raised the necessary sum. Then Bussy joined his company, full of his resentment against Madame de Sévigné —"*amie jusqu'à la bourse*," he calls her; and when, a year afterwards, to amuse Madame de Montglas, he wrote his history of the 'Loves of the Gaules,' containing satirical portraits of all the chief persons of the day, the cruel attack upon Madame de Sévigné appeared.

"At last the day came," says the lady,—"the unhappy day when I read for myself, with my own 'ill-matched eyes,' that which I had refused to believe in. If horns had started from my head I should have been less amazed. I read and re-read that cruel portrait. I might have been amused with it had it been written of another person than me, by another than you. . . . To be in every one's hands; to find one's self in print, the laughing-stock of the Provinces, where such things do irreparable injury; to be on every book-shelf—to receive this cruel pain, and from whom? I will not dwell longer upon all my reasons for suffering: you have good sense, and I am sure a quarter of an hour's reflection will make you see it all, and feel as I do. . . .

"This is what I wanted to say to you once in my life, and I entreat you to erase from your mind all idea that it is I who am to blame. Keep this letter and read it, if ever the fancy takes you to disbelieve me, and be just to us both, as you would be were you judging of something happening between two other persons,—own that you have cruelly offended the friendship between us, and I am disarmed."

Madame de Sévigné may well have been disarmed by Bussy's repentance, which was generous and complete. It will be as well to give his own words:—

"I was in the wrong, but the resentment I afterwards felt towards her was the height of my injustice. I shall never blame myself enough for having offended the prettiest woman in France—my near relation, whom I had always loved, and

whose friendship I never had reason to doubt. It is a stain on my life that I tried indeed to obliterate, when the *surintendant* was arrested, by loudly taking the part of the Marquise against those who would have confounded her with the mistresses of that Minister. Not only generosity but truth impelled me to act in this way. Before embarking on the Marquise's defence, I consulted Le Tellier, who, except the king, alone had seen the letters in Fouquet's casket. He told me that those written by the Marquise were the letters of a friend with no little wit, and that they had delighted the king far more than all the sentimental nullities of the rest. The *surintendant* had been greatly to blame when he mixed up friendship with so much love-making. The Marquise was well pleased by my defence. Her kind heart and her near relationship both caused her to forgive me, and since that time (which also was that of my disgrace) her affection for me rekindled; and except for some explanations, and some little reproaches which a painful remembrance drew from her, there are no marks of friendship which I have not received from her since then, nor of gratitude that I have not tried to show, and that I shall not owe her for the rest of my life. We resumed our friendship in the first year of my exile."

This is quoted from a printed note to his memoirs. Writing to his cousin in private, he dwells—and not without some justice—on the displeasure it caused him when the only person of his blood whom he loved in all the world abandoned him in an affair of honour in which she ran no risk:—

"I own,' he says, "that I had then as much hatred for you as I had felt affection before. It is ever so; and if I had gone no further, you would never have washed yourself free from the stain of abandoning your friend and kinsman in his need; but my after-conduct effaced your fault."

She sends him, in return, what she terms a *duplique* to his *replique*—an answer to his reply, which is conclusive, but not easy to translate:—

"*Où diantre*," says the lady. "Would you have had me find twelve or fifteen thousand francs? Do you think I kept them in a money-box? Unless the Abbé de Coulanges had been my surety, I could not have raised the quarter of a crown, and he would do nothing without this Burgundian security, whether necessary or not."

"The day after receiving this letter from the Marquise," says the Count, "I answered as follows: 'No one can be less capable of *triplique* than I am, my fair cousin. Why, then, do you oblige me to it? I gave myself up from the first. I asked for life; you wish to slay me helpless on the ground,—is not this somewhat inhuman? Dare then, *petite brutale*, to strike a man who throws himself at your feet, who confesses his fault, and who prays for forgiveness.'"

Then comes a pleasant epistle from the lady:—

"Rise, Count! I do not wish to kill you on the spot. If you wish it, take up your sword to resume the combat. But it seems better still that I should grant you your life, and that we should live in peace. Only own to the truth—that is all I ask. This is a friendly enough condition. You can no longer call me, with any justice, '*petite brutale*.'"

Then she gaily concludes her letter:—

"Farewell, Count! Now that I have vanquished you, I shall tell every one that you are the bravest man in France, and describe our encounter on the day when I speak of single-handed fights. My daughter sends you her compliments. The good opinion you have of her fortunes consoles us a little."

This is the end—almost the end—of the quarrel. Bussy's answers seem to have delayed. The lady pun-

ishes him with a couple of delightful fanciful scoldings. She fears that, with all the best intentions in the world, she may have killed him outright (not being accustomed to handle a weapon). This is the only reason which she can accept for his not having answered; and then again, has he not received her letter granting him quarter? She was far from wishing to slay him on the ground; she was expecting to hear from him after this noble action. "You never thought of an answer," she says, reproachfully; "you were content to rise, take up your sword, and walk away, never intending, I hope, to use it against me any more." And so the two make friends,—perhaps, as Mesnard says, "with a more tender and serious feeling on Bussy's side than he had ever experienced in his life before." He was alone now—deserted by many, embittered by disappointment and broken hopes—a man of boundless ambition and vanity, doomed to failure and inaction. In his loneliness her friendship and the warmth of her generous heart must have endeared her to him far more than the sprightly charm of her wit.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN FRANCE.

One of Madame de Sévigné's letters to Rabutin contains the compliments of the prettiest girl in France. "The name pleases me well enough," says the mother, "but I confess that I am somewhat tired of doing its honours."

Madlle. de Sévigné was born in 1646, and was consequently about 22 years of age at the time. There is no mention of her in her mother's early letters, and all that we know of her childhood consists of some few allusions to it in the Marquise's later correspondence. In one letter Madame de Sévigné wonders at her own courage in having had the "barbarity" to send her little girl to a convent. "They told me it was necessary for your education," she says pathetically, in her own excuse, and also at the same time pleading the cause of Madame de Grignan's own children against their mother.

There is also an allusion to a story of a slap on the cheek, given by little Marguerite de Sévigné to a youthful companion, who ventured to approach an ugly face too near her own. "It is to be feared," says her biographer, "that the not over-judicious parent only laughed instead of reproving this ebullition." The friend of the

family, the Abbé la Mousse (no doubt the Abbé de Coulanges brought a good deal of clerical society to the house), used to instruct the young lady, and teach her to read Descartes; and he seems to have occasionally remonstrated with his pupil on account of her vanity. "Remember that all your beauty will turn to dust and ashes," says the Abbé. "Yes," cries the young lady; "but I am not yet dust and ashes."

Two centuries ago Mdlle. de Sévigné was a very beautiful creature—as fair as her mother, we are told, more brilliant, less winning, with more regular features, with a colder nature. The poets of the time sang the charms of the two—each looking more beautiful for the reflection of the other's beauty. We hear of Mdlle. de Sévigné at Court, where she is much praised for an accomplishment she inherits from her mother. She danced admirably, and was chosen to figure in the king's royal ballet with the charming young Madame (whose sad fate is so touchingly recorded by Madame de Motteville); with Mdlle. de Saint Simon, described by her brother as "perfectly good and perfectly beautiful" (Madame de Sévigné takes a less complimentary view of the lady); with Mdlle. de Mortemar, who soon after became Madame de Montespan; and with Louise de la Vallière, that pathetic figure in history. Certain characters in fiction, certain men and women who have lived, and whose stories have remained to us, will never cease to appeal to our sympathy.

We owe something more than dancing masks to these years, 1667-68. It was a great epoch in politics and in literature. Racine, Molière, La Fontaine,[1] were

[1] "A year before Mademoiselle de Sévigné's marriage, La Fontaine dedicated to her his fable of the *Lion amoureux*, proving thereby his

bringing out their greatest works; critics and poets and preachers, saints and sinners, were all alike full of life and energetic interest in this life and the next. The learned Jansenists were holding their own at Port Royal; Madame de Sévigné's strong sympathy for them was well known. Condé and Turenne, those two great rivals, were leading the king's armies from victory to victory. Even Louis took his own mysterious part in the march of events: he did not forget Mazarin's early training, and played his game, setting one great man against another, one country's disaster against another, ever keeping in view the supremacy of the King of France.

Notwithstanding her dancing and her beauty, Mdlle. de Sévigné's marriage was still a matter of anxiety to her mother. Once or twice everything had seemed on the point of being settled, but each time Madame la Marquise had interfered to break off engagements which did not appear to her to promise well for the girl's happiness. Suitors seem to have kept somewhat aloof, and those who presented themselves were scarcely what the fond mother could have expected. One young man was stupid and rich; another bore a doubtful character, although a Duke. Other suggestions were made which concerned Mdlle. de Sévigné's future. The scheming Bussy spoke out quite openly at the time of La Vallière's decline: the mother and daughter were happily unconscious of these horrible suggestions. They went their ways, welcomed by their friends, enjoying life and its interests. Sometimes they

interest in all that concerned his friends. *Le Curé et le mort* is a version in verse of one of Madame de Sévigné's letters, and Madame de Sévigné's celebrated account of the death of Louvois is a version in prose of one of La Fontaine's fables, *La mort et le mourant.*" —J. A.

retired to Livry with the good Abbé; sometimes they travelled into Brittany to superintend their domains and to read their books. The Hôtel de Nevers was one of their favourite haunts in Paris: it seems to have been a second Hôtel de Rambouillet. Boileau and Racine were its poets; its mistress was that faithful friend of Fouquet's, Madame du Plessis Guénegaud. Here wits and fine ladies met, and indulged in all sorts of sports and *jeux de société*. Madame de Sévigné herself took part in some of the little plays that were performed to amuse the companies assembled.

One whole autumn she seems to have spent with her daughter at Fresnes, the country-house of Madame de Guénegaud. There is a pleasant letter describing the party assembled there. It is written to Pomponne, then ambassador at the Court of Stockholm. He would like to be there, she tells him, and she goes on to write the moment down.

"M. d'Andilly on my left hand—that is to say, on the side of my heart; Madame de la Fayette on my right; Madame du Plessis is just before me (she is amusing herself by daubing little figures); Madame de Motteville a little further on, meditating profoundly. There are also present our Comte de Cessac, whom I fear because I hardly know him; Madame de Caderousse, and her sister, a newly culled fruit that you are not acquainted with; and, above all, Mademoiselle de Sévigné, coming and going by the dressing-room, fluttering like a firefly. I am assured, sir, that this company would greatly please you, most of all if you could see in what manner you are remembered here."

In the same way that Mr Huxley, or some other great physiologist, might reconstruct the whole of an extinct existence from one or two bones still remaining, Walck-

enaer,[1] the historian of Madame de Sévigné, goes on to reconstruct the whole society of her day, and to tell the history of all those by whom she was surrounded. He gives a comprehensive sketch of each person mentioned, —Madame de la Fayette, the faithful friend of La Rochefoucauld and of Sévigné; De Motteville, the upright Court lady, the touching historian of Anne of Austria, and of poor, pathetic, charming Madame, whose tragedy was yet to come. He gives us the fortunes of the "newly culled fruit"—the young unmarried daughters of the house; of the eldest, who was married to the Duc de Caderousse, whose suit Madame de Sévigné had repelled; of De Cessac, who is Madame de Guénegaud's relation, not Madame de Sévigné's. Her dislike to him is apparently well founded, for De Cessac was afterwards dismissed from Court for cheating at cards. Then our biographer goes on to tell us much more that is not written down,—how the ladies returned to Paris for the latter part of the autumn; how they saw the "Misanthrope" played, and witnessed the success of "Andromaque," that lovely tragedy, even then more popular than the history of the great Cid himself. He describes a letter of Mdlle. de Sévigné's, and its fastening of rose-coloured ribbon, sealed with a device, *Il piu grato nasconde.* He even tells us who presented this device to the fair Marguerite; and so goes on patiently and almost marvellously, exhausting the facts which are to be deduced from the faint, quaint, fast-fading signs which remain after two hundred years are past.

Meanwhile the glorious conquests of Louis XIV. were echoing far and wide; their echoes were drowning the

[1] The work of Hypolite Babon should also be mentioned here.

tinkling of the guitars, and their victories were bringing the usual epilogues of pain, and tears, and parting.

"Almost every one," says Madame de Sévigné, in one of these letters to Pomponne, "is in misery about brother or husband; for, notwithstanding all our success, there is always somebody being killed or wounded. For me who am ever hoping that I have some future son-in-law engaged with the rest, I wish for the general safety of all the chevaliers."

This son-in-law is her chief preoccupation and interest. Then at last comes the personage so long expected, discussed, and dwelt upon; perhaps to English ears the news is somewhat crudely expressed. She writes to Bussy, to whom she is in the act of being reconciled:—

"I must tell you something which, without doubt, will give you pleasure. It is, that the prettiest girl in France is to marry, not the best-looking youth, but one of the most honest men in the kingdom — M. de Grignan, whom you have long known. All his wives are dead, so as to make room for your cousin; and by extraordinary good fortune, his father and his son as well. So that being richer than he ever was before, and moreover, by birth and standing, and by his good qualities, all that we could wish for, we make no such bargains as are customary, but trust to the two families that have passed before us. M. de Grignan himself seems well pleased with our alliance."

Marriage must have been an everyday affair to Grignan, after his several experiences. Mdlle. de Sévigné was somewhat perturbed, and would, it is said, have gladly put off the wedding. De Retz was also of her mind, and greatly troubled by the confidence which Madame de Sévigné showed in her son-in-law's solvency. It is true he had land and high lineage, and both his first wives had brought him

ample dowries; but he was a man of expensive habits and involved estates. We are told that he had to raise money even to pay the expenses of his second marriage with Mdlle. du Puy du Fou et de Champagne. His first wife had been also an heiress—Angélique Clarisse d'Angennes. She was a daughter of the incomparable Arthenice; but this lady's fortune seems to have been secured to her two daughters; and so it came to pass that of Mdlle. de Sévigné's ample *dot*, 180,000 livres were to go at once to pay the bridegroom's debts. In vain did the Cardinal utter his warnings. Madame de Sévigné is not the first mother-in-law whose enthusiasm for her son-in-law has known no delays or precautions, and they evidently liked each other's society. She used to laugh gaily at his jokes and his irregular features. She called him Le grand Matou, because of his tuft of hair; but, at the same time, she declared that he was "the most desirable of husbands, and of divine society." He was an honourable man, though inclined to extravagance; brave, accomplished, and of easy temper. At the time of his marriage he was Lieutenant-General in Languedoc; later he was appointed to a still higher post. De Grignan was near forty, and very plain, as has been said, but of good figure and excellent understanding, — an honest man, noble, polite, "knowing what was due to himself," says Saint Simon.

The contract was signed on the 27th of January 1669, and on the 29th the marriage took place. Madame de Sévigné notes that it is the day of Saint Francis de Sales. The wedding seems to have been a very brilliant affair, and the names of the guests echo with the clang of ancestral dignities. Monteils, Adhémars, Grignans in differ-

ent combinations, or all three in one; Rochefoucaulds, Polignacs, Simianes, Harcourts, De Brancas on the side of the bridegroom. The ladies' roll is less imposing; for the Sévignés, noble as they were, and of ancient race, had lost many of their chiefs, and belonged to the losing side in politics. They had little interest, and had formed no great alliances of late. De Retz, their most powerful ally, was in disgrace; Bussy, the head of the Chantals, was exiled from Paris; the young Baron de Sévigné never attained to the dignities which should have been his by right of descent.

He was not present at his sister's wedding, but left La Mousse as his representative. The young man was away on a chivalrous adventure. He had joined the ill-fated crusade headed by La Feuillade, which started to fight the Turks in Candia. The expedition was entirely composed of volunteers, of the noblest families, who took arms as privates in this sacred cause. De Sévigné belonged to the company commanded by Saint Paul, who was afterwards killed at the passage of the Rhine. Young Sévigné had consulted the bellicose Bussy, the Cardinal de Retz, and La Rochefoucauld, who had each their own reasons for advising him to go. When all was settled he told his mother, and the poor soul had to accept his determination. His word was given; it was too late to retract.

Saint Simon is undoubtedly hard upon the young Baron, whom he describes as not so much a man of wit as a man modelled upon a wit; and who says that of the charm and abundance of his mother, and the frigid polish of his sister, he had made an awkward mixture. Saint Simon, however, allows that he was a good and honest

man; it would seem impossible not to feel a genuine admiration for Charles de Sévigné's warm-hearted generosity and nobleness of nature. His love for his mother was of that pure and unselfish quality, seeking not its own, not envious. His own rights never seem to trouble him; his second place he accepts with a generous sweetness. I confess that, with all my admiration for that charming mother, I cannot forgive her entirely for doing such scant justice to her son's tender and honourable nature. The young Baron's early follies must have recalled his father's lamentable career to her mind, and blinded her to the son's nobler qualities. One episode in the young man's life must indeed have given a sickening pang to his mother's heart, and may partly account for the strange difference in her feeling for her children. In early life Charles de Sévigné fell under that same fatal spell of Ninon de l'Enclos's influence which had first ruined Madame de Sévigné's home happiness. But Charles de Sévigné was a different man from his father. He had heart and reality of feeling. Charles had all the heart, all the depth of feeling in which his father had been wanting. His letter to his sister, written soon after their mother's death, is one of the most touching and generous ever penned.

"If it should be true," he says, "that there was some more tender feeling in our mother's heart for you than for me, can you believe in good faith, my dearest sister, that I should deem it a fault in her that you should be more lovable than I? And as to her fortune, be it want of luck or of merit, mine has not been such as to call for an extra portion. Enjoy quietly and in peace that which you owe to my mother's affection and goodwill. Even if it were in my power to interfere (and the mere thought of it fills me with

horror), I should look upon myself as a monster if I had the slightest intention of so doing. Three parts of my life are run; I have no children of my own, and you have given me some I tenderly love. If I could wish to be more rich, it would only be so far as your children are concerned."

All this was long, long after the times of which we are treating.

The Grignan marriage was in 1669, and did not go off without some *contretemps*. As usual, there is an episode with Bussy, who seems to have been justly offended by the coldness and incivility of the Comte de Grignan on the occasion, and refuses to sign the contract or to write his congratulations. Madame de Sévigné is determined to keep everybody good friends. She persuades, entreats, and explains difficulties away. "With what good grace," says M. Mesnard, "does she abuse every privilege of a woman!" "You are right in that in which anybody else would be wrong," says Bussy, yielding as usual to her entreaties. M. de Grignan also had to yield to her wishes, when, less than a year after his marriage, his governorship was transferred from Languedoc to Provence, and it became necessary for him at once to assume his position. He left his wife in Paris under her mother's care. Madame de Sévigné was determined to keep her daughter, and her earliest letters to Grignan concern Madame de Grignan and her health, and the baby born some months after his departure. The grandmother is triumphant, and the mother-in-law still more so.

"Have I not given you the most charming wife in the world?" she cries. "Is it possible to be more well behaved, more notable? can you be more tenderly loved, could anybody have more Christian sentiments? . . . Your wife still complains bitterly of all the days that we have detained

her here, and says seriously that it is cruel to have separated her from you. One would think that it was for our own pleasure that we had sent you off two hundred leagues."

"Do not let us speak of this woman," she writes again; "we love her beyond all reason. She is very well; and I am writing to you to-day on my own private account. I want to speak to you of M. de Marseille, and to entreat you, by all the confidence you have in me, to follow my advice in your conduct towards him. I know what the Provinces are, and the pleasure people take in encouraging divisions there. I assure you that time or other reasons have changed his feeling. These few days past he is greatly softened; and if only you would not treat him as an enemy, you would not find one in him. Let us take him at his word until he has done something against it. Nothing is more likely to change good feeling than to show doubt; it is often enough to be suspected of being an enemy to become one in fact. Confidence, on the contrary, leads to right doing; we are touched by the good opinion of others, nor does one easily resolve to lose it. Open your heart, and you will perhaps be surprised by the result."

These letters are full of good sense, of interest and solicitude, as well as of tender absurdity where her daughter is concerned: few people are more clear-sighted than Madame de Sévigné when she is not rapturously gazing at Madame de Grignan's perfections. Her admiration for her daughter may have been excessive,—her love for her is far more touching, and must come home to all who have ever loved any one else, or been loved themselves. Compliments in which we are expected to agree may easily jar upon us, but such tender, unselfish affection and devotion can only touch our truest and most natural sympathy.

CHAPTER XI.

A ROMANTIC PRINCESS.

The mother and daughter were still together, when an event took place which might be deemed less surprising now than at a time when caste was worshipped with that fervour which still exists among oriental nations, where it forms part of a religious creed. In Madame de Sévigné's day, precedence in this world and in the next were not disentangled; and even in our own enlightened times the two things do not seem set quite apart in people's minds. Madame de Grignan, being still at home, is not yet a correspondent: M. de Coulanges, the little fat cousin, is the person upon whom she pours out her delightful abundance of interest, and emotion, and excitement.

"Paris, *Monday, December* 15, 1670.

"I am going to tell you of the most astonishing thing,—the most surprising—the most marvellous—the most miraculous—the most triumphant—the most bewildering, unheard-of—the most singular, extraordinary, unbelievable, unforeseen event; the greatest, the smallest, the rarest, the commonest, the most vibrating, until this day the most secret; the most brilliant and enviable: in short, a thing of which

one finds but one example in past ages,—a thing which we in Paris cannot believe; how, then, will you credit it at Lyons? . . . a thing which may happen on Sunday, and which perhaps, on Monday, will not have been done. I cannot make up my mind to tell you,—try to find it out for yourself. I give you three chances. Do you give it up? Well, then, I must tell you: M. de Lauzun is to be married at the Louvre on Sunday — guess to whom. I give you four, I give you ten, I give you a hundred to one that you do not guess. I hear Madame de Coulanges saying, 'Here is a pretty mystification! It is Madame de la Vallière.' No, madame; you are wrong. 'Then, I suppose it is Mademoiselle de Retz.' Nothing of the sort, you country lady. 'Oh, indeed! do you think us so very dense? It must be Mademoiselle Colbert.' Still less. 'Then, surely Mademoiselle de Créqui.' You are quite out of it. I see I shall have to tell you at last. He is to be married on Sunday, at the Louvre, with the sanction of the king, to Mademoiselle— Mademoiselle de — Mademoiselle—— Guess again. He marries Mademoiselle,—on my word, my sacred word,— Mademoiselle—the great Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle, the daughter of the late Monsieur—the granddaughter of Henry IV.—Mademoiselle d'Eu! Mademoiselle de Dombes! Mademoiselle de Montpensier! Mademoiselle d'Orléans! Mademoiselle, first cousin to the king! Mademoiselle destined for a throne!"

Madame de Sévigné scarcely did justice at first to the true-hearted, grotesque, one-idea'd princess, who was ready to sacrifice her throne, her fortune, her high position, for the sake of a selfish schemer,[1] who had been able for a time to conceal his interested and sordid motives. She attributed every high quality to Lauzun

[1] "Lauzun, in order to fascinate, chose the strange method of insolence and scorn. His nephew afterwards used the same successful means to charm the daughter of the Regent."—J. A.

—every delicate scruple; adored him; nearly broke her heart when the king retracted his sanction; was faithful to him for years and years; and finally, poor soul, having attained her dream, woke up from it as from a nightmare. Madame de Sévigné, who began by laughing, ended in sympathy with the poor princess.

"*December* 19, 1670.

"That which is described as dropping from the clouds is what happened yesterday at the Tuileries; but I must go farther back than yesterday. You are still in all the joyful transports and raptures of the princess and her happy lover. On Monday the thing was declared, as I told you. All Tuesday went by in talk, in wonder, in compliments. On Wednesday Mademoiselle made a formal donation to M. de Lauzun, in order that he should have the necessary titles, names, and adornments with which to figure in the marriage-contract, which was drawn up that same day. She gave him (just to begin with) four duchies: the county of Eu, which is the first peerage in France, and which confers the first rank; the Duchy of Montpensier, of which he bore the name all day; the Duchy of St Fargeau; the Duchy of Chatellerault,—all of which are computed at twenty-two millions. Thursday morning—that is to say, yesterday—Mademoiselle hoped that the king would have signed the contract, as he had promised to do; but about seven o'clock in the evening, the queen, Monsieur, and several *barbons* persuaded his Majesty that this affair was doing harm to his reputation; so that, having sent for Mademoiselle and M. de Lauzun, the king declared to them, in the presence of Monsieur le Prince, that he positively forbade their thinking any more of this marriage. M. de Lauzun received this order with all the respect, the submission—all the courage and the despair—which so great a catastrophe deserved. As for Mademoiselle, following her humour, she burst into tears, into cries, with violent distress and excessive complainings: all day she has kept her bed,

and would take nothing but broth. . . . What a subject for romance or for tragedy! above all, what a fine subject for us to discuss, and to speak of, without ceasing! That is what we all do, day and night, evening and morning, unendingly, unceasingly, and we hope that you will do the same."

So Madame de Sévigné tells the story at first. Later on, having again seen the Princess, who sent for her, and poured out her full heart, the not hard-hearted *confidante* is melted and touched by the poor lady's unfeigned misery.

"She called me to her, embraced me, bathed me in her tears," writes Madame de Sévigné. "She said, 'Alas! do you remember all that you said to me yesterday? Ah, cruel prudence! Ah, prudence! prudence!' She made *me* weep, so bitterly did she weep herself. I have returned to see her twice: she is in great affliction, and has treated me all along as a person who would sympathise with her sufferings. Nor has she been mistaken. I have felt on this occasion what people rarely feel for persons of so exalted a rank. This is between us two and Madame de Coulanges; for, as you may imagine, such a confidence would be ridiculous with others. Adieu."

Tragedies, comedies, farces, elegies, and marriage-epithalamiums quickly follow each other, as we read in our volume. Of poor Mademoiselle's long fidelity; of Montespan's enmity to Lauzun, and his many years' incarceration; of the sacrifices made by the romantic lady, and the king's consent to accept the enormous bribes she offered for her lover's release, Mademoiselle has herself given the history in her memoirs. It is a story at once pathetic, laughable, and genuinely truthful.

Madame de Grignan had been married for many months, and had not yet visited her own home. Mon-

sieur de Grignan was still absent in his province, nor able to leave his post. Even Madame de Sévigné could find no further excuse for detaining her daughter. Madame de Grignan had recovered from her confinement: her baby was now some months old. In those days it seemed the natural thing for mothers to separate from their infants, however reluctant they might be to part from their married daughters. The letters written after Madame de Grignan's first departure are full of all the anguish of parting. The poor desolate mother is alone for the first time. The home is empty, except for the little nursling baby left to keep her company.

"My trouble would not be what it is if I could describe it to you," she says; "but I shall not try to write it down. In vain I look for my dear child. I do not find her, and every step she takes divides us farther and farther asunder. . . . I went to Ste Marie crying, dying: it seemed to me that my heart and my soul were being torn from me. Indeed it was so in truth. I asked to be alone, and they led me into a room belonging to Madame de Housset, where they lit a fire. Agnès kept looking at me without a word. There I remained five hours without ceasing to weep; my thoughts seemed to kill me. I wrote to Monsieur de Grignan. You may imagine how I wrote. Then I went to Madame de la Fayette, who renewed my pain by the sympathy she showed for it. She was alone, sick—saddened by the death of a sister, a nun. She was as I could have wished to find her. Then came Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld. They only spoke to me concerning you. . . . At eight o'clock I came back from Madame de la Fayette; but as I returned to this place—ah! do you understand what I felt when I climbed the steps? There was the room where I always entered. I found the doors open wide, but everything unfurnished, disarranged, and your little daughter in the place of my own. Do you understand all that I suffered? The

awakenings of the night were dark indeed, and in the morning my spirits were no calmer. You make me again feel all that it is possible to feel of tenderness; and if you think of me, be assured that I also continually am thinking of you. It is what the devout call an habitual preoccupation; it is what one should feel for God: nothing distracts me,—for ever I see that carriage progressing always, which will never come nearer.[1] I am always on the highroads. Sometimes I fear lest the carriage may upset: the heavy rains of the last three days have put me to despair; the Rhone frightens me strangely. I have a map before my eyes. I know the places where you stop: you are at Nevers to-night, on Sunday you will be at Lyons. Ah, my child! what would I not give to see you, to hear you, to enfold you—*to see you pass by*, if all the rest is too much to ask!"

Here is a touch of which we must all recognise the truth:—

"I have seen that poor Madame Amelot. She weeps bitterly. *Je m'y connais.*"

The poor lady is experienced in tears. In this same letter there is also a tender reproach which hints at passing difficulties:—

"*Méchante!*" says the mother, "why do you sometimes hide from me such precious treasures [of affection]? You are afraid I should die of joy; but do you not fear lest I should die of displeasure when I imagine the contrary? D'Haqueville will bear me witness to the state in which he has formerly seen me; . . . but let us quit these miserable remembrances."

So the letters flow on, full of love and preoccupation, with a vividness of detail, a tender absorption, which bears irresistible witness to their genuineness of feeling.

[1] "Ce char toujours fuyant," says Phèdre to her *confidante*.

People have accused Madame de Sévigné of playing a *rôle*, of occasionally posing as the adoring mother; but any one who has ever felt, even in part, what is here described, will recognise the truth and the simplicity of the many anxieties, preoccupations, quick-changing emotions, absurd susceptibilities, of a hungry heart. There seems to have been love enough in this woman to make half-a-dozen daughters happy; perhaps, poor lady, there was too much for the happiness of one. Such affection, such absorption, could not be returned by a cold-blooded person with an irritable temper and expensive habits, a husband, a huge household, a whole province to preoccupy her. That Madame de Grignan should have written so constantly, and preserved her mother's letters so carefully, gives more assurance of her merit than all the enthusiastic praises in the correspondence itself, and indeed it seems almost disloyal to the tender parent pouring out her whole heart to doubt of her child's merit.

"I am all by myself to-day in my room, where my ill-humour has brought me. I am weary of everything. It was a pleasure to me to dine alone, as it is now a pleasure to write to you without any reason; but you, alas! have not such relief as this. I write on quietly; but I cannot imagine that you can read in the same way—I cannot see a moment which you may claim for yourself. I see a husband who adores you, who is never weary of your company, and who can scarce believe in his own happiness. There are orations, infinities of compliments, of civilities, of visits, excessive honours, which are paid to you; and to all of this you have to answer, you are overwhelmed. What does your laziness do with all this confusion? does it suffer, does it hide away in some inner closet, and die for fear lest it should not find

its proper place? It waits for you, for some chance moment in which to remind you, at least, of its existence, and to say a passing word. 'Alas!' says Laziness, 'have you quite forgotten me? Remember I am your oldest friend—that one which has never abandoned you—the faithful companion of your brightest days,—I who consoled you for lost pleasures, and who sometimes taught you to hate them—I who have prevented you from dying of weariness, and in Brittany, and when you were laid up. Sometimes your mother disturbed our pleasures; but I knew where to find you again. Now I know not how to behave. These honours, these representations, will be the death of me if you do not take care.' And it seems as if you said a little friendly passing word, and gave some hopes of being more free at Grignan; but you go by quickly, and have no time to say much. Duty and reason surround you, and do not give you one moment's peace. I myself, who have always respected them, am against them, as they are against me. . . . I assure you, my dear child, I am continually thinking of you, and every day I feel what you once said to me, that there are certain thoughts upon which we dare not dwell—we must slide across them."

She then goes on to recapitulate the parting:—

"The closet where I embraced you without knowing what I did, the church of the Capucins where I went to hear the Mass, the tears which fell from my eyes to the ground as if water had been spilt, the convent, Madame de la Fayette, my return to this house, your room, the night, the morning, your first letter, and all the others, and all the days, and all the meetings with those who could enter into my sentiments. Poor D'Haqueville was the first. I shall never forget the pity he showed for me. . . . I am taking an unfair advantage of you, my dearest," she says, in conclusion. "I have allowed myself this letter to-day; my heart needed it—but I will not make a custom of writing them."

All this is in the first burst of separation. "How

much I wish to get a letter from you! It is nearly half an hour since I received the last," she writes. Then she begins to give news again; encloses a letter from Bossuet—M. de Condom, as he was called; goes into enthusiasm over Bourdaloue's sermon on death; describes with interest a thrilling crisis as to who is to present Mademoiselle with a table-napkin. She can be entertaining even though she is in tears.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAGEDY OF VATEL.

THERE is much truth in a remark of Michelet, who points out how curiously the pleasant, sprightly mind of one country lady, writing down second-hand gossip, influences our impression of an age, of a Court, of which she knew comparatively little; whereas the real actors of those days, who have told their own stories in far less vivid language, are comparatively forgotten and ignored. Madame de Sévigné's glimpses, even though they be but reflected by her own imagination, are so vivid, that we are immediately convinced by her account; and her *tableaux vivants* present visions which remain in our minds, whether or not they were correct. Take the story of the Court in the chapel, listening to Bourdaloue's sermon, and the Maréchal de Grammont so transported by the discourse, that he exclaims out loud, "*'S death, he has the best of it!*" Madame bursts out laughing. The sermon is interrupted: no one knows what is to happen next. Madame de Sévigné was no more present on this occasion than we ourselves; but nevertheless she takes us there, and proceeds to moralise upon the event. "I do not think," she says to her daughter, "from the way in

which you describe your preachers, that it is with admiration that you interrupt them."

Here is another episode which concerns the Maréchal:

"I must tell you a little story which will amuse you. It is quite a true one. The king has lately been dabbling in verses. Messieurs de St Aignan and Dangeau are giving him lessons in the art. He made a little madrigal the other day, with which he himself was not over-delighted. One morning he said to the Maréchal de Grammont, 'Monsieur le Maréchal, I beg of you to look at this little madrigal, and tell me if you ever read anything so pointless: since it has been known that I have had a taste for verses, I am overwhelmed with them.' The Maréchal, after reading the verses, said to the king, 'Sire, your Majesty is a divinely inspired critic. It is perfectly undeniable that this is the most stupid and ridiculous madrigal I ever read.' The king laughed, and said, 'Don't you think that the person who wrote it must be very fatuous?' 'Sire, there is no other word by which to describe him.' 'Well,' said the king, 'I am delighted at your speaking so openly: it is I who wrote it.' 'Ah, Sire, what treason!—let your Majesty give it me back; I read it hurriedly.' 'No, Monsieur le Maréchal; first feelings are always the best.' The king laughed heartily at this absurdity, and every one thinks it is the most cruel little joke to play upon an old courtier. For my part, I, who always love to make reflections, wish the king would do so too, and judge from this how little likely he is ever to know the truth on any subject."

It was in 1671 that Louis XIV. finally determined upon his campaign against Holland; and having secured the consent of Europe to this heroic undertaking, and wishing to do honour to the great general who was to take the command,[1] the king graciously accepted an invi-

[1] "Although a professed and assiduous courtier, Condé kept up a

tation to Chantilly, where a *fête* was to be given in the forest, the details of which were superintended by the Duc d'Enghien himself; while Vatel, the general of all the cooks, was to provide the food. Everything was arranged with the greatest care and magnificence, everything was going on brilliantly and smoothly, when an event occurred which cast a gloom over the whole festivity, and of which the description is best given in Madame de Sévigné's own words. It was on April 26, 1671, that she writes—

"This is not a letter, but an account which Moreuil has just given me of what happened at Chantilly concerning Vatel. I wrote to you on Friday that he had stabbed himself: this is the story in detail:—The king arrived on Thursday evening. The hunt, the lanterns, the moonlight, the promenading, the collation in a garden of jonquils—all was everything that could be desired. Supper came; the joint failed at one or two tables on account of some unexpected diners. This upset Vatel. He said several times, 'My honour is lost; this is a disgrace that I cannot endure.' He said to Gourville, 'My head fails me; I have not slept for twelve nights. Help me to give my orders.' Gourville consoled him as best he could. The joint which had failed, not at the king's table but at the 25th table, haunted his mind. Gourville told Monsieur le Prince. Monsieur le Prince went up to him in his room and said, 'Vatel, all is well; there never was anything so beautiful as the king's supper.' He answered, 'Monseigneur, your goodness overwhelms me. I know the joint failed at two tables.' 'Nothing of the sort,' said Monsieur le Prince; 'do not disturb yourself,—all is well.' Midnight comes: the fireworks do not succeed; a cloud overspread them; they cost sixteen thousand francs.

certain independence of feeling and conduct. He engaged, as an inheritance from Fouquet, Vatel his superintendent, and Gourville his man of business."—J. A.

At four o'clock in the morning Vatel wanders about all over the place: everything is asleep. He meets a small purveyor with two loads of fish. He asks him, 'Is this all?' 'Yes, sir.' The man did not know that Vatel had sent to all the seaport towns in France. They wait some time; the other purveyors do not arrive. He grows excited; he thinks that no more fish will arrive. He finds Gourville, and says to him, 'Sir, I shall not be able to survive this disgrace. My honour and reputation are at stake.' Gourville only laughed at him. Then Vatel goes up to his own room, puts his sword against the door, and runs it through his heart—it was the third thrust, for he gave himself two wounds which were not mortal. He falls down quite dead. Meanwhile the fish is coming in from every side: people are seeking for Vatel to distribute it; they reach his room, they clamour, they burst open the door, they find him lying bathed in his blood. Monsieur le Prince is hurriedly summoned; he is in utter despair. Monsieur le Duc burst into tears; it was upon Vatel that his whole journey to Burgundy depended. Monsieur le Prince told the king, very sadly, 'It was said to be the excess of his own code of honour.' They praised him; they praised and they blamed his courage. The king said that for five years he had delayed his coming, because he knew the extreme trouble his visit would cause. . . . But it was too late for poor Vatel. Gourville, however, tried to repair the loss of Vatel, and the loss was repaired. The dinner was excellent; so was the luncheon. They supped, they walked, there were games, there was hunting, the scent of jonquils was everywhere; it was an enchanted scene."

This letter was written on a Sunday, and on the following Wednesday Madame de Sévigné herself left Paris for a few days, and went to Livry, stopping on the way at Pomponne in order to see the venerable Arnauld d'Andilly, the father of Pomponne, the Minister—the brother of the celebrated Mère Angélique of Port Royal.

He was a wise old man of upwards of eighty years of age, who appears to have received her with great kindness, and almost fatherly interest; to have talked to her about herself,—her own state of mind; to have urged her with much earnestness to think more seriously of serious things. She was a pretty pagan, he told her; she had an idol in her heart, and her idolatry was no less dangerous than any other. She had not a word to answer him with, she writes; but the conversation made no difference in her convictions. After a few days spent at Livry, where the idol is not forgotten, Madame de Sévigné returns to Paris, and receives a letter from Madame de Grignan, written at Marseilles, which fills her with delight.

Madame de Grignan's progress homewards is like that of a queen. She is the chief lady in Provence, and is entertained everywhere with almost royal honours. This mode of life seems to be agreeable to the belle Madelonne. She is *fêted* everywhere, welcomed with brilliant hospitality; to the sound of the cannons, the *hou* of the galley-slaves. Her approach is the signal for compliments and for noises of every description. Out of politeness to her, the name of Madame de Sévigné is given as the password for the day; all of which she seems to have described at length, as well as her own beauty, and the junketing and the feasting, and the groans of the prisoners sinking day and night under the weight of their chains. Her mother shudders at the thought of the prisoners, quotes the line—

"E di mezzo d'orrore esce il diletto"—

and then recapitulates her daughter's letter in delightful

admiration, and winds up with a fervent wish that she could present her compliments to the captain-general of the galleys.

It is impossible not to be struck in all cases by the acquiescence of people at their ease in the misery and suffering around them. Madame de Sévigné, with all her loving heart, was not faultless, and sometimes her sentences are witty where we should have still more loved her if she had been unsophisticated; but her whole life was surrounded by ceremony and sophistication. The footman, lady's-maid, luncheon-basket, and rug of the present, would make but a sorry figure beside the triumphal processions which escort the travelling marquises and comtesses of those days. When Madame de Sévigné is leaving Paris for Brittany, she writes:—

"I start on Monday. I think you must want to know my equipage in order to see me pass by, as I watched M. Busche go by. I am travelling with two carriages. I have seven carriage-horses, one baggage-horse to carry my bed, and three or four outriders. I shall be in my own open coach drawn by two beautiful horses. The Abbé will be sometimes with me. In the other carriage go my son, La Mousse, and Hélène. To this carriage there will be four horses, with a postilion."

So they go off—horses, postilion, Abbés, lady's-maid, Marquise, and Baron—making their leisurely way along the road that led north to the old chateau near Vitré. They amuse themselves on the way with readings from Corneille by the young Baron; while the Abbés conduct the devotional exercises. Then it is described how Vaillant, the land-steward, had wished to give them a brilliant reception, and had raised a little army of 1500

men to receive them, all armed, and neatly dressed with new ribbons to their collars. These people go in orderly array to wait for the travellers about a mile from the house. Alas! nobody appears, although the poor army is in waiting from early in the morning until late at night, when, sorry and disappointed, it is disbanded, and returns to its various homes. The Abbé had mentioned the wrong day, and then forgot having so done, and the travellers come up quietly without any reception, and settle down to their tranquil country life.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE ROCHERS.

THESE early letters from the Rochers are full of a tranquil melancholy freshness which is not unlike some of the best of George Sand's pastoral idyls. Can the mother see these alleys, these devices, this little study, these books, these rooms, without sadness indescribable? There are agreeable memories, but others so sweet, so tender, as to be scarcely supportable. Sometimes she has reveries in the forest, after which she comes back shaken as by an attack of fever. Then she begins to look round, to revive, to describe how her little trees are flourishing in great beauty, and how the gardener, with sedulous care and honesty, is training them up as high as the clouds. Nothing is so lovely as these alleys which have seen her daughter's infancy.

"Alas! my child," she says, "how countrified are my letters at present! Once upon a time I could talk of Paris with other people; now you will only have news of me, and yet my confidence in you is so great that I am persuaded you would rather have this news than any other. The company I have here pleases me much. Our Abbé is always admirable. My son and La Mousse are ready to put up with me, and I with them. We are always seeking each other; and

when my affairs keep me away from them, they are all in despair, and think me absurd to prefer a farmer's tale to one of La Fontaine's. They are every one of them devoted to you, and are, I believe, about to write to you. For me, I come in advance; I do not care to speak to you in a tumult. My daughter, love me always: my life, my soul, are in your love. In you are centred all my joys and all my sorrows. I own to you that all the rest of my life seems to be covered with shadow and sadness, when I reflect that so much of it is destined to be spent away from you."

"Farewell," she says, concluding another letter. "I am cross; I am bad company. When I shall have received your letter, my words will come back to me. At bedtime, when one lies down, one has thoughts which are grey and brown, as M. de la Rochefoucauld says, and at night they become black altogether."

Hers is one of those quick and impressionable natures of which the moods change,—for whom the present is everything; though be it remembered that to faithful natures this present ever contains the affections which are an integral part of loving souls: to Madame de Sévigné all through her life her daughter was ever present.

A Whit-Sunday follows the black and brown one.

"*Sunday.* — At last, my child, I breathe freely. I sup like M. de la Souche. My heart is relieved from a weight which gave me no rest. I could better endure to be a little delayed in your remembrance than to bear that horrible anxiety about your health. But how I repent having written all my fears! It will give you pain while my own is ended. This is the misfortune of absence. Alas! it is not the only one. And so you are blooming! What! not pale, not thin, not exhausted, like the princess Olympia! Ah! I am too happy. Amuse yourself; take care of yourself. I thank you for dressing yourself."

Then she goes back to her original theme—that fugue of separation which haunts her always.

"How true it is," she says, "that we seem to see each other, to speak to each other, through a thick crape veil! You at least know the Rochers, and your imagination can paint us as we are; but as for me, I know not where I am. I have *made* a Provence for myself—a home in Aix—perhaps more beautiful than the one you possess. I can see you in it; I can see Grignan too; but you have no trees,—that troubles me. I cannot go where you walk. I fear lest the wind should blow you from off your terrace. If I thought some whirlwind would carry you off here to me, I would keep my windows open, and God knows how I would receive you!"

So the lady travels in spirit forwards and backwards from the unknown Provence to the present Brittany.

Whether or not the lady's imagination embellished the home of her daughter, it is certain that nothing could be a more delightful picture than that one of the life she is leading in her old chateau. It is like the *mise-en-scène* of one of Alfred de Musset's most charming proverbs. Enter the Abbés, enter the brilliant lady, enter the Baron with his songs. There is the elder Abbé, the uncle, with his accounts and counters, carefully going over the business items in the study where he sits; there is the easy-going and easily persuaded La Mousse, who was afterwards converted by his own catechumens, in the library with his books. There is the smiling Marquise working at her altar-cloth, and listening with bright eyes to her son's readings and recitals. He makes her laugh, nor will he let her go on with her serious course of study. The Baron prefers Rabelais to

Nicole, Corneille to Tacitus. He pours out verses, fables, comedies, which he acts like Molière, says his mother. When he is gone they mean to resume their sermons. As for Paris and the Court, they are already far distant from her mind: for her only Brittany and Provence exist; and she is beginning, so she says, to make the best of things,—to spend her days in some little peace and joy, after the heartbreaking days of parting through which she has had to pass. Her son, when he is there, makes her laugh; and then when she remembers that her daughter is *not* there, she goes away to her own room to weep. But it is not whilst her son is with her that she is to be pitied,—he and the Abbés make up a happy home together, and brighten her days as they pass. Out of doors Pilois the gardener is her trusty escort; he is her favourite companion, and she prefers his conversation to that of many who have the title of Chevalier at the Parliament of Rennes. She tells her daughter how much she sees of him, and that they are constantly about together at all seasons, in wet weather and in sunshine, consulting, devising new alleys, new improvements, new inscriptions. The literary fashion of the day seems to have been to hang sentences and mottoes everywhere,—inside the old halls and outside in the pleasure-grounds, on the trees as well as the scutcheons. "Sweet inertia," says one tree; "Lovers hate idleness," cries another. Madame de Sévigné had a fancy for erecting little summer-houses for new plantations and avenues. She takes to building, too, and enlarges the chapel for which she is working the altar-cloth. The neighbours, says Walckenaer, hearing this, take it for granted that she loves the place and loves them too, and means to spend

her life among them. But it is to be feared that Madame la Marquise was scarcely deserving of her popularity, and had no such intention. Sometimes, it is true, she pays a visit in a carriage with six horses, attended by her son. Nothing is more pleasant. They seem to fly,—so she declares; they sing songs along the road. They are charmed with the Chateau de Fouesnel, where they call, and with its amiable inhabitants; but at other times she complains (in confidence, be it remembered, and writing privately to her daughter) of the wearisomeness of tiresome company, and confesses her joy as she sees the carriagefuls driving off. I have known, and do still know, some saints who have, I do believe, never grudged any human being's share of their friendly time and charity; but there are not many such, and too many of us can, alas! sympathise with Madame de Sévigné on this occasion. Among the neighbours are noble ladies from Vitré, who call, rejoicing in the strange names of Bonne foi de Croqueoison and of De Kerborgne. They appear in short dresses cut high above the instep, which amuse their hostess. Perhaps at this distance of time it may be allowed that the petticoats were not unreasonable, for it seems to have been a rainy season. "Most people say, After the rain comes the fine weather," writes the lady; "but we say, After the rain, more rain." Another neighbour is Mademoiselle du Plessis, who appears and disappears in the letters. One day we find her declaring that twelve hundred joints had been roasted on the occasion of her sister's marriage. "'Twelve hundred? Perhaps you mean twelve, Mademoiselle.' 'No, Madame; twelve hundred, or let us say eleven hundred for fear of exaggeration.' She would not abate a single

chicken," says Madame de Sévigné, who again, on another day, writes, "Here comes Mademoiselle du Plessis. She bestows upon me the kiss which you remember, and begs me to show her that part of your letters where you speak of her. My son is impertinent enough to declare to her before me that you always mention her with much pleasure; and then he goes on to say to me, 'Show her the letter, Madame, that she may be assured of this.' I turn crimson, as you do when you think of the sins of others. I am obliged to tell a thousand fibs,—to say that I have burnt the letter. Such are among the malices of our ensign."

Mademoiselle du Plessis was the daughter of some quiet neighbours with whom Madame de Sévigné was on terms of friendly intimacy. The girl appears to have been singularly plain, ill-mannered, and affected; and although apparently devoted to the Marquise, this lady may have had good reason for mistrusting the sincerity of somewhat overdone professions. Perhaps, however, when writing to her daughter (and as other mothers are apt to do), she laughed with her child, while in her heart she felt some self-reproach for her own satire.

Besides these humble neighbours there are also more important personages mentioned. Chief among them are the Governors of Brittany, the Duke and Duchess de Chaulnes, who make much of the charming widow. Of the Duke later records give a cruel portrait. The Duchess seems to have been an impulsive and sprightly person, wishing for amusement and also for the company of Madame de Sévigné. There is a sense of Shakespearian life in the mirth-loving companies that come and go, unexpected, uninvited, laughing, joking, clattering

on horseback into the courtyard at the Rochers. At other times they arrive in disguise. They are like the people in "As You Like It," and our Lady Rosalind adds too much to the brightness of the hour to be willingly allowed to hide herself away for long in her old moss-grown castle. But though she is glad to see them, she complains to her daughter, not without reason, of the expense and trouble of so much society, and finds four or five hundred pounds a great deal to spend on *fricassées*. There is something essentially French in the character of Madame de Sévigné,—in her economies as well as her expenses, her good sense and her gaiety of heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

SYLLABUBS, DUCHESSES, AND HAYMAKERS.

BRITTANY had certain independent rights and privileges of its own in those days, and among them that of assembling a sort of parliament at Rennes, which was by way of settling the affairs of the Province. When these *Etats Généraux* are opened, all the country assembles to do honour to the ancient institution, to enjoy itself, to feast, to make merry. Madame de Sévigné also joins the concourse, never having been there before, and is warmly welcomed. This is her impression of what goes on. Subsequent events showed, alas! only too plainly, how correct her impression was.

"The Etats do not last long," she says; "they ask what is the king's will, they themselves say not one word, and all is done. . . . An infinity of presents given, of pensions granted, of roads and towns repaired; fifteen or twenty great tables constantly spread; unceasing gambling; perpetual balls; comedies three times a-week; a great deal of finery,—that is what we mean by the States-General. I am forgetting," she adds, "the three or four hundred pipes of wine which are swallowed; but though I overlook this trifling item, others take care to remember it."

Madame de Sévigné did not remain with the merry-makers for any length of time on this first occasion; and after paying her farewell compliments to Madame de Chaulnes, came home. All Brittany was tipsy the day she left; forty gentlemen had dined in the room beneath hers, and had each drunk forty healths—that of the king coming first—and all the glasses being broken after it. The pretext for all this was intense joy and extreme gratitude for the king's liberality in returning 25,000 francs out of the present which the province was compelled to make to the Crown. "Thus the present is now only 2,250,000 francs," says Madame de Sévigné, who is *not* tipsy with gratitude. But she had not escaped so easily.

"Here I am," she writes a few days later, from Vitré, "in full county company; otherwise the whole county would be at the Rochers. Last Sunday, as soon as I had sealed my letters, I saw four carriages with six horses in my courtyard, with fifty *gardes* on horseback, several chargers led and several equerries riding. It was M. de Chaulnes, M. de Rohan, M. de Lavardin, Messieurs de Cöetlogon, De Lomaria, the Baron de Guais, the Bishops of Rennes, of St Malo, Messieurs d'Argouge, and eight or ten more I did not know. I am forgetting Monsieur d'Harouïs, who is not worth mentioning. I receive all these, a great deal is said, a great deal is answered. After a walk, with which they all seemed greatly pleased, a very excellent and very abundant collation was discovered at the end of my terrace, and above all, Burgundy wine flowing like the waters of Forgues: all this was supposed to be conjured up by magic. M. de Chaulnes begged me most pressingly to go to Vitré,[1] and I accordingly went there on Monday evening. Madame de Chaulnes gave me

[1] There are delightful glimpses of Vitré, with its gables and arches, in Mr Caldecott's sketches and Mr Birket Foster's views of Brittany.

supper, with the comedy of 'Tartuffe' not ill played, and a ball, where the *passepied* and the minuet nearly made me cry, they reminded me so vividly of you. People often ask me about you, and I am not long in finding answers. I always think that every one can see my thoughts through my petticoat-body. . . .

"In the evening we supped together; then came the ball. I wish you could see the graces of M. de Lomaria, and the air with which he takes off his hat and puts it on again. What lightness, what precision! he might defy the whole Court."

Madame de Sévigné has a weakness for dandies. Here is an allusion to an agreeable scamp she seems to have had some liking for—M. de Pomenars, notorious in many ways. But our easy-going Marchioness pronounces him divine, and says there is nobody for whom she would so gladly wish two heads: never will his one head last him his life.

She enjoys all this company, but is longing to be quietly at home again with her Abbés, or walking by herself in her lonely avenues,—for poor La Mousse is suffering from toothache, and cannot escort her.

"Do not fear for me the weariness that comes from solitude; except for the evils which come from my heart, against which I have no strength, I am to be pitied for nothing. My humour is a happy one, and I find myself better here and alone than in the bustle of Vitré. I have been for eight days in a peace, which has cured me of a most horrible chill. I drank water, I did not speak, I did not sup; and although I did not shorten one of my wanderings, I cured myself. Madame de Chaulnes, Mademoiselle de Murinais, Madame Fourché, and a good-looking girl from Nantes, were here on Thursday. Madame de Chaulnes rushed in saying she could no longer rest without seeing me; that all Brittany was weighing on her shoulders, and that, in short, she was

dying of it all. Upon which she flung herself upon my bed, every one surrounding her, and in one moment she was fast asleep from sheer weariness. We went on talking, and she woke up at last, praising and delighting in the agreeable liberty of the Rochers."

Although the quotation is long it is impossible not to continue it, so pleasant and pretty a picture does it give of the Watteau-like life of those days :—

"We sat in the depths of those woodlands," she says, "while the others were playing their mall; and I made her describe Rome to me, and by what chance she had married M. de Chaulnes, for I always try to interest myself. While we were absorbed, comes a barbarous rain like that at Livry, which, without warning, suddenly begins to drown us, to drench our clothes with water. In one moment the leaves were saturated, in the next our clothes were sodden. We all have to run,—some of us call out, some fall down, some slide. At last we reach home, a great fire is made up; every one changes slips and petticoats—I supplying everything; shoes are dried; we die of laughing. Thus we treated the Governess of Brittany in her own province. After everything else came a pleasant collation, and then this poor woman returned, no doubt more loath to take up her wearisome *rôle* than offended by the liberties with which she had been treated here."

It was in order to do honour to the Duchesse de Chaulnes that Madame de Sévigné had wished to have her meadows mown some little time before, and on that occasion it was that the celebrated letter was written to Monsieur de Coulanges concerning the lazy valet. It is one which Madame de Thianges admired, and sent to borrow, together with a second which is unfortunately lost, and which was called the "Letter of the Horse."

"This word is over and above my fortnightly letter, my dear cousin, to inform you that you will soon have the honour of receiving Picard; and as he is the brother of Madame de Coulanges' valet, I am glad to let you know what my measures concerning him have been. You know that Madame de Chaulnes is at Vitré: she is there awaiting her husband, the Duke, who arrives in ten or twelve days for the opening of the Brittany Chambers. You think that I am wandering: she is there awaiting her husband and all the Chambers, and, meanwhile, she is at Vitré all alone, dying of dulness. You cannot understand how this will ever lead to Picard. She is there dying of dulness. I am her only consolation, and you can well believe with what a high hand I carry it over Mademoiselle de Kerbone and De Kerqueoison. All this is very roundabout, but nevertheless we shall soon reach the point. As I am her only consolation, after having paid her a visit, she must come to me, and I want her to find my lawns neat and my alleys neat—those great alleys which you love. But still you don't understand where this is leading. Here is another little circumstance relating to it. You know this is haymaking time: I had no labourers, so I am obliged to send to that meadow which the poets have praised, to fetch all those working there to come and clean up here (you still see no point), and in their place I send all my people to *faner*. Do you know what to *faner* means? I must explain: to *faner* is the prettiest thing in the world. It is to turn hay over and over whilst gambolling in a meadow; if one can do this much, one can *faner*.

"All my people went off gaily: Picard alone came to tell me he wouldn't go,—that he hadn't entered my service for this,—that it was not his business, and that he preferred going back to Paris. Upon my word my wrath rose. I reflected that this was the hundredth time he had offended me,—that he had no heart, nor feeling; in a word, the measure was overflowing. I took him at his word, and in spite of all that was said for him, I remained as firm as a rock, and he is gone. It is true justice to treat people according to their services, good or bad. If you see him again, don't

receive him, don't protect him, don't blame me; and remember that he is the fellow in all the world who least likes haymaking, and is the most unworthy of being well treated. This is the story in a few words. For my part, I like narratives in which one is only told what is necessary without any straying either to the right or to the left, or going back to the beginning of things. In short, to speak without any vanity, I think you have here a model of a pleasant narrative."

After all the junketing comes a very natural reaction.

"I am cross to-day, my child; I am as when you used to say, '*You* are cross;' I am sad, I have no news of you. A great friendship is never tranquil,—*maxime;* it rains, we are alone; in a word, I wish you more joy than I have to-day."

But though she complains a little, and is, as all sensitive people must be, liable to sudden changes and depressions, this must have been, on the whole, a happy time of her life. She is at home among her own people and her own possessions, she is comparatively young still, her health is good, her beauty great, her wits are bright, she is richer than in later days, when for her children's sake she had despoiled herself of so much, that instead of driving with the six horses harnessed to her carriage, she had a difficulty in buying two. Some of her most beautiful letters are written at this time. Here is one refreshing in tone and in sentiment:—

"You know that I am always a little obstinate about my reading. It is in the interest of those to whom I speak that I should read beautiful books. That one which now concerns us is the 'Morale' of Nicole. There is a treatise in it upon the art of maintaining peace among men, which delights me. I have never seen anything more useful, nor

more witty and full of enlightenment. If you have not read it, do so; if you have read it, read it with new attention. I can believe that every one will find himself in it: for me, I am persuaded it was written to my intention. I hope to profit by it—I shall try to do so. You know I never could endure that old people should say, I am too old to correct myself. I could more easily forgive the young folks for saying, We are too young. Youth is so amiable that we could only adore it if the soul and the mind were as perfect as the body; but when one is no longer young, then it is that one must try to perfect one's self, and try to regain by good qualities that which one loses in the agreeable ones. It is long since I first began to make these reflections, and for this reason every day I mean to improve, in soul, in mind, in sentiment. It is with these things that I am preoccupied with which I fill this letter, not having many other subjects upon which to write."

"I imagine you at Lambese," she continues; "but I cannot see you plainly from here. *There are shadows in my imagination which hide you away from my sight.*"

Another passage in this letter describing the younger of her two Abbés must not be omitted. How delightfully the story is told! how pleasantly the figure is sketched!

"As to La Mousse, he holds catechisms on saints' days and Sundays. He wishes to go to heaven. I tell him it is on account of his curiosity, and in order to assure himself once and for all whether the sun is a mass of dust moving violently, or a globe of fire. The other day he was interrogating some little children, and after several questions, they began jumbling up everything together, so that, when he came to ask them who the Virgin was, they all answered one after the other, that she was the creator of heaven and earth. He was not at all shaken by these little children; but when he heard some of the men and women, and even the old men,

saying the same thing, he at last became convinced, and gave in to the general opinion. In short, he didn't know any longer where he was, and if I hadn't arrived at that moment, he would never have got out of it. This new view would have caused a very different disturbance from the various movements of the small molecules."

So writes Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, an ardent disciple of Descartes, whose works she had studied under the guidance of this same La Mousse.

Madame de Sévigné stayed on at the Rochers till late in November, anxiously waiting for news of Madame de Grignan, whose lying-in was daily expected. "You ask me," writes the mother, "whether we have any green leaves left on our trees. Yes, there are many still: they are woven in and out with aurora tints and dead foliage. The whole makes a web of very lovely texture." This was on the 15th of November 1671. On the 29th she receives the good news of her daughter's safety. It is impossible not to love her for her open-hearted delight.

"Do you know what one does in so great an excess of joy?" she writes. "The heart seems too full: one weeps without being able to stop one's self. These tears are of a sweetness which cannot be compared to anything,—not even to the brightest joys. You who are a philosopher, you know the meaning of all these results. As for me, I feel them, and I am going to cause as many masses to be said in gratitude to God for His goodness as I used to offer up to ask for it. If this state could last for ever, life would be too happy; but one must enjoy the present,—sorrows come soon enough. . . . My child, I thank you more than a thousand times for the three lines you have written to me—they complete my full joy. My Abbé is transported, as I am, and our Mousse is enchanted."

CHAPTER XV.

TORCHES AND BEACONS.

ALL this winter of 1671-72, wars and rumours of war were in the air. Charles de Sévigné had left Paris when his mother reached the capital. He had been ordered to join Luxembourg's army, which was encamped near Cologne. Madame de Sévigné had come back to a new house which she had lately taken, with an apartment in it destined for her daughter and her son-in-law,—"the pretty apartment where you can be settled without unsettling me." It was near the Place Royale where she was born, and round about which she lived all her life. She saw her old friends, she made some new acquaintance, she tried for her children's sake to keep up her connection with the Court; she wrote letters to her son, who was spending the winter in dull hardship and wearisomeness. "I am unhappy for your little brother. He is very cold; he is camping out; he is for ever marching towards Cologne. I had hoped to see him here this winter, but there he still is." So says Madame de Sévigné in her letters to her daughter, who was meanwhile enjoying her life to the uttermost, and sparing neither present debt nor future difficulties in order to gratify her

ambitions. One gets a general impression of grandeur—flags, trumpets, carriages and horses, company, and hosts of idle servants below, whilst the masters play cards up above. Nearly a hundred people sit down to dinner every day in the Chateau de Grignan; and besides all this, new courts are built, new turrets are raised, and enclosing walls. It is not yet known upon what dangerous foundations this splendour is reared. The sons of the family club together to keep up the pomp of the ancestral home. The daughters are driven into convents in order to contribute their portions to the general expense; but it is not to be met even by such sacrifices as these, and debts and display seem to have been an inheritance in the ancient family. Madame de Sévigné—prudent woman that she was—is beginning already to write warning after warning. Sainte Chantal's granddaughter, the Abbé's pupil, has a born gift for administration; but this, unfortunately, does not seem to have descended to Madame de Grignan: display, vanity, reckless expenditure, gambling of every sort, seem to have been her curse and that of her foolish family. The Grignans in Provence were only following the example of the Court in Paris, where expensive displays and masquerades were filling the minds of the courtiers, but among these things were others more worthy to be remembered. Racine was bringing out "Bajazet;" Corneille was reading his new play to Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld—Corneille, whom Madame de Sévigné places so infinitely beyond Racine. "It is good taste to admire Corneille beyond every one," she says somewhere, and she urges her daughter always to show good taste.

The age was rich in literary work of every kind: wars

and anxieties did not quench the eager spirit all about Molière, and La Fontaine was delighting the world. A humbler genius, La Rochefoucauld, was publishing a new edition of his Maxims. "Here they are," says Madame de Sévigné, "revised, corrected, augmented: I send them to you from him. There are some which seem to me divine, others which to my shame I cannot understand." Then after describing her little granddaughter's bedtime and *le petit coucher* of Mademoiselle d'Adhémar in a few charming sentences, she goes on to public affairs, and speaks of the war again: "Spain is taking the part of Holland; God preserve France from the Swedes and the English."

Madame de Sévigné hears all sorts of news from all sorts of people. She is very much in the world; her children are away; there is nothing to keep her at home. She is going out and about very constantly with friends, such as the Coulanges, Pomponne, and Madame de la Fayette; and, besides these, she makes many new ones, among whom not the least noticeable is Madame Scarron, still the governess of the king's natural children, but destined to be Madame de Maintenon, Queen of France in all but name. The ladies spend their evenings constantly in each other's society; they drive about together.

"We enjoyed escorting Madame Scarron back at midnight to the very depths of the Faubourg St Germain, almost by Vaugirard in the country. It is a fine and large house, into which one is not allowed to enter. There seem to be a large garden, and fine big rooms. She has a carriage, horses, and attendants. She is dressed modestly and magnificently, as a woman who passes her life with persons of quality. She is

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amiable, beautiful, good, and natural; she is very agreeable company. We came home gaily by the light of lanterns, and without any fear of thieves."

In juxtaposition with this, I feel impelled to quote a description of the mother of the children confided to Madame de Maintenon's care. It was written some years later.

"The queen has been twice to the Carmelites with *Quanto* (Madame de Montespan). This latter took it into her head to have a lottery: she caused everything that could be suitable for nuns to be brought. This made a great play in the community. She talked much with Sister Louise de la Misericorde (Madame de la Vallière). She asked her if, in truth, she was as happy there as people said. 'No,' answered the other, 'I am not happy; but I am content.' Quanto then talked a great deal about the brother of Monsieur (the king), and inquired if she had any message for him,—if there was anything she could say for her. The other very quietly, but perhaps piqued by this patronage, 'Anything you like, madame; anything you like,'—this spoken with all the grace, wit, and modesty imaginable. Quanto then wished to eat, and gave a piece of forty pistoles to buy what was necessary for a certain sauce which she herself concocted, and which she ate with admirable appetite. I tell you the facts without any comments."

Little comment, indeed, is needed to this curious description.

Madame de Sévigné, although longing to rejoin her daughter, was detained in Paris by the dangerous illness of her aunt, Madame de la Trousse. She remained therefore at her post; her little baby granddaughter was also under her care.

"Yesterday," she writes, "I dined with La Troche, in company with the Abbé Arnauld and Madame de Valentiné.

After dinner we had Le Camus, and his son and heir. It all made up a very perfect little symphony. Then came Mademoiselle de Grignan with her attendant knight, Beaulieu; her governess, Hélène; her lady's-maid, Marie; her little lackey, who was Jaco, the son of her nurse; and the nurse herself in her Sunday clothes. She is the very nicest countrywoman I have ever known. All these people were brought forward,—they were sent into the garden and much admired. I love this little household almost too much. . . . But, my child, the question is about our departure. One day the Abbé and I say to each other, 'Let us go! the aunt will linger until the autumn.' The next day we find her so exhausted that we say, 'We must not think of going, it would be barbarous. She will not live beyond the May moon.' And thus we go from one day to another. Do you understand this condition? It is very cruel. One thing which makes me wish to be in Provence, is to be able to feel sincerely grieved by the loss of a person who has always been so dear to me; and I feel that if I am here, the liberty that I should gain would seem to take away a portion of my tenderness and of my true nature. . . . Leave us to unravel this sad adventure, and be assured that the Abbé and I are more ready to offend conventionality by leaving too soon, than the feeling which we have for you, by remaining without necessity."

How pretty all this is about the little grandchild, how natural and well expressed, how tenderly felt! If people have good moods and bad ones in the course of their many varied lives, this surely was one of the wisest and best of Madame de Sévigné's many moods. She did her duty bravely all through this summer; she tended her sick, consoled those in trouble, bore up against her own anxieties, sacrificed her own wishes to her sense of right. It was not for herself that she made excuses and avoided that which seemed to her the best. It was

not for her own convenience that she left unfulfilled any duty in life. When her suffering aunt died at last, she closed the weary eyes and brought home to her own house a cross and lonely cousin whom she seems to have kept with her for many years.[1]

Madame de Sévigné's own letters are full of sadness about this time.

"Am I, too, to meet this sorrow, with so many others who are at present in my heart? The extreme peril in which my son is placed; the war raging more and more fiercely each day; the couriers who only now bring the news of the death of some one or other of our friends and acquaintances, and who may bring worse news still to me; the dread one feels lest bad news should come, and the curiosity one has to know of it; the desolation of those who are overwhelmed with sorrow, and with whom I spend so much of my life; the indescribable condition of my aunt; the longing I have to see you,—all this makes me lead a life so strange and contrary to my humour and temperament, that I must in truth have good health to withstand so much.

"I am well," she continues; "but of what use is my health to me? it only serves to watch those who have none. The fever has traitorously seized poor Madame de la Fayette; my aunt is more suffering than ever—she is sinking day by day. What can I do? I leave my aunt's to hurry to the poor La Fayette, and then again I leave La Fayette to return

[1] There are many allusions to Mademoiselle de Meri, and to the domestic storms incident to her stay. It is most assuredly the precision of the Abbé. When arithmetic is ignored, when the rules of twice two make four are offended in any way, the good Abbé is beside himself: it is his temper, and he must be taken on this footing. On the other hand, Mademoiselle de Meri is quite different. When, for fun or from conviction, she has taken up a side, there is no end to it. She drives him on, the Abbé is suffocated by a torrent of words. He loses his temper, plays the uncle, and bids her sharply "be silent." In return he is told he has no politeness.

to my aunt. Neither Livry, nor my walks, nor my pretty house, are anything to me now; and yet I must go to Livry for a moment's rest, for I am quite worn out."

Madame de Sévigné was present by chance when the news came, "falling like hail," upon the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, of the death of poor young De Longueville, his reputed son—of the wound of the Prince de Marsillac, his heir—of the death of the Chevalier de Marsillac. Poor Madame de Longueville's despair is most affectingly described also.

"You have never seen Paris in its present state: everybody is weeping or expecting to weep. One keeps thinking of poor Madame de Nugent. Madame de Longueville, I hear, is quite heartbroken. I have not seen her, but this is what I have been told. Mademoiselle de Vertus had been back two days at Port Royal, where she almost always is. She was sent for with Monsieur Arnauld to break this terrible news. Mademoiselle de Vertus had only to show herself; this hurried return implied something dreadful as soon as she appeared. 'Ah, Mademoiselle, how is my brother?' Her thought did not dare go any farther. 'Madame, he is getting over his wound.' 'There has been a battle—and my son——?' She received no answer. 'O my son! my dear child! Answer me, Mademoiselle, is he dead?' 'Madame, I have no words with which to answer.' 'O my dear son! Did he die instantly? Not one single moment's grace? O my God, what a sacrifice!' And thereupon she fell on her bed, and went through everything which the most keen anguish could make her endure — convulsions, fainting fits, death-like silences, smothered cries, bitter tears, transports towards heaven, tender, piteous wailings. She sees certain people; she takes nourishment, because it is the will of God she should do so; she can get no kind of rest; her health, already bad, is visibly getting worse. For my part, death is what I wish for her, not seeing how she is to live after such a loss."

CHAPTER XVI.

LE REVERS DE LA MEDAILLE.

Few will find fault with Madame de Sévigné's personal relations with those she loved, and to whom she felt bound by the ties of life. In impersonal things she has been blamed, as I have said, for the want of feeling she showed in describing certain events, such as the sufferings of the poor country-folks in Brittany during the wicked campaign of 1675, when their unsparing governor, the Duc de Chaulnes, first drove the peasants to rise against the cruelty of his rule, and then put down the rebellion with armed force and cruel executions horrible to read of. That the Marquise's sympathy was in the right place, there is no doubt. She was too just and too clear-sighted not to see the truth; but that she turned away from it and from painful realities, and avoided any strong emotion that did not seem to her to be part of her own life, is no less true. This avoidance of the vicarious pain of others' sufferings is perhaps the besetting temptation of highly wrought natures and fine sensibilities. It is one which haunts the beginning of life when people do not know, and the end of life when they know too well. In Madame de Sévigné, some such things—especially during

these years — jar upon one's genuine admiration and enthusiasm. So little more is wanting to this sweet, sensible, and delightful woman, that one grudges the inadvertent evidences of want of courage to face the truth — want of honest, righteous indignation where wrong was done, which she should have resented; but at the time—the earlier time of which we have been writing — it would be a captious critic indeed who could do aught but admire and respect her devotion, her cheerful goodness, her wonderful sympathy and perception.

It is quite cheering to hear of her at last fulfilling her heart's desire, and enfolding the idolised form of her daughter once more in her arms. She seems to have reached Grignan in the autumn, and made occasional excursions from time to time. What a pleasant letter is that one dated from Lambesc, the 20th December 1672!

". . . I was all ready dressed at eight o'clock. I had drunk my coffee, heard the Mass, made all my farewells. The luggage was loaded: the bells of the mules were reminding me that it was time to mount into the litter. My room was full of people: they were entreating me not to start for several days. The rain had been falling steadily since yesterday: it had rained continuously, and at this very moment it is pouring more heavily than usual. I bravely resisted all these persuasions, honourably keeping to the resolution I had taken, and which I announced to you by post yesterday, assuring you that I should arrive on Thursday, when suddenly M. de Grignan, in an omelette-coloured dressing-gown, appears, and speaks to me so seriously of the temerity of my enterprise,—assuring me that my muleteer would not be able to follow my litter, that my mules would be falling into the ditches, that my people would be drenched and unable to assist me,—that in one moment I changed my opinion, and

yielded entirely to his own remonstrances. Thus, my child, coffers are brought back into the house, mules unharnessed, maids and men drying themselves after having only crossed the yard, and a messenger despatched to you, knowing your goodness and your anxiety, and waiting also to quiet my own mind (for I am in trouble about your health); and this man will either return and bring us news of you or lose his way in the roads. In a word, my child, he will arrive on Thursday at Grignan instead of me, and I shall actually start when it pleases Heaven; and M. de Grignan, who rules me in good faith, and who understands all the reasons which make me reasonable, desires to be at Grignan."

When Charles de Sévigné got back to Paris at last, his mother was still in Provence with her daughter. She had vainly hoped that the Baron might have joined them, but his leave was very brief. He found Madame de la Fayette in Paris, and he went to her, for she writes about this time asking for money for the young man, and reminding Madame de Sévigné that her excessive liberality towards her daughter entails some equivalent towards her other child.[1] The young soldier's expenses were enormous, as indeed were the expenses of all the wars and all the warriors of those days. The ensign, let us hope, obtained his supplies, for he soon hurried back to his army, in which was M. de Luxem-

1 "Your son has just left me," writes faithful Madame de la Fayette. "He came to bid me farewell, and to beg me to explain to you the reason he has for needing money. They are so good that I have no need to explain them to you at much length, for you can realise from where you are the expense of an endless campaign: every one is in despair, every one is ruined. It is impossible that your son should not do a little as others do; and besides this, the great affection you have for Madame de Grignan should make you testify to her brother as well." The beautiful pearl necklace which is painted in the portraits had just gone to Madame de Grignan.

bourg, as his mother said. Madame de Sévigné meanwhile remained with her daughter until October, when they parted after a whole year spent together, during which another son was born to Madame de Grignan. The poor Marquise does not get used to these partings, and writes as touchingly as ever:—

"This is a terrible day, my child. I own to you that it is almost more than I can bear. I have left you in a state which only adds to my pain. I think of all the steps you take, and of those I also take, and how in this way it might happen that we might never meet again. This heart is at rest when I am near to you; it seems to be its natural condition, and the only one that contents it. . . . I am always looking for you, and I find that everything is wanting because you are wanting. . . . I must not hope more from the future than from the past. I know what your absence has made me suffer, and that I shall be still more to be pitied. It seems to me that I did not half embrace you when we parted: I did not tell you enough how your tenderness has satisfied me."

And so on, and so on. She is *steeped* in Grignans, she says. She did not come back straight from Provence, but took a month on her road, going round by Bourbilly, the home of her forefathers, to collect her rents, which seem to have been very scarce notwithstanding the plenty of the harvest and the fulness of the crops. She returned to Paris to her cousin's house at first—to that Emmanuel de Coulanges who was her playfellow all through life, and to whom almost her latest letter is written. The little, round, jovial, merry, easy-going man is well known to us through Saint Simon's description, and so is his wife—the sylph, the leaflet, as Madame de Sévigné calls her. There are extant letters

—not very readable—of Madame de Coulanges. She is described as lively, talkative, brilliant,—welcomed at Court and everywhere else for her bright wits. It was a reproach to her, in this age of universal grasping, that she begged no favour either for herself or for her husband from her powerful relations. She and M. de Coulanges seem to have lived apart for many years: the only thing we hear of her asking is once when she is very ill, and she sends a farewell message to her parents, with a request that they will remember to leave money to her husband, for although she is estranged from him she cannot forget that before quitting him she spent all his. The two were living together when Madame de Sévigné arrived from Provence, and she seems to have received a little ovation on this occasion. She sets down a page full of the names of the people who came to supper on her arrival. She then retired to the most comfortable bed in the world, which she says wearied her more than her whole four weeks of travel. After counting every hour, she finally arose in the dawn to find a chicken and a pan of broth simmering on her hob; and at nine o'clock in the morning most of the people who had left at two seemed to have returned again.

"If you ask me what people speak of in Paris," she writes, "I should tell you that they speak only of M. and Madame de Grignan, their affairs, their interests." This was about the time of the siege of Orange, a stronghold in France fortified by the Dutch, which M. de Grignan had been ordered to attack. The garrison was very small. People said that he (Grignan) would have to bombard it with roast apples. The country rallied round him on this occasion, and the Count, at his own

expense, raised an army, and besieged and carried the old place in its sunny plain among the olives and the vineyards. His exploit brought him into favour at Court: the king graciously remarked that he was satisfied with Grignan. Madame de Sévigné, delighted, sends off the news, and urges them by every inducement to lose no time in coming to Paris to profit by the sunshine of their favour. Pomponne also is all-powerful at this time, and very favourably disposed towards his old friend and her children. Madame de Sévigné had long known Pomponne and his family. It was to him that she wrote the well-known letters about the trial of Fouquet, which are the first we have of hers. She seems to have lived on easy and familiar terms with him, and she describes among other things how she had amused herself by playing a certain game with the great Minister, a game that many people have tried to play since her time. It is called the *reverse side of the cards*, and it consists in guessing at the realities that lie under the resemblances all round about. On one occasion Pomponne had turned a compliment, which she repeats with no little pleasure. "Would you know," he says, "why it is that Madame de Sévigné appears to love Madame de Grignan so passionately? It is because she loves her passionately."

This game, applied to the events now crowding in daily from every side, might have revealed strange contrasts to the national trophies of splendour, victory, prosperity. There go the king's triumphant armies, invading peaceful and unoffending nations, with great magnificence and clanking, with victorious generals commanding. Here come deputies from the provinces, swelling the crowds of courtiers, with abject gratitude

for ridiculous favours; and on the other side we find misery and sorrow, the poor oppressed and ruined,[1] starving country-folks rebelling, homes desolate, rich and poor alike in sorrow and tribulation.

We have read of the old Maréchal de Grammont and his buffoon-like performances. There is a description of the Maréchal, which gives a very different picture of the poor old courtier. A courtier no longer, a stricken father mourning his son, it is indeed a reverse side to the glittering medal. It is dated December 8, 1673.

"I must begin by telling you about the death of the Comte de Guiche. The poor fellow died of illness and exhaustion in the army of M. de Turenne; the news arrived on Tuesday morning. Father Bourdaloue came to announce what had occurred to the Maréchal de Grammont, who was not unprepared, for he knew of his son's extreme danger. He made every one go out of his room. He was in the little apartment just outside the Capucines. When he was alone with the priest, he flung his arms round his neck, saying that he guessed what he had come to tell him; that it was his own death-stroke, and that he received it from the hand of God; that he was losing the only and the veritable object of all his tenderness and all his natural inclination; that he had never had any real joy or real sorrow except by this son, who had many admirable qualities. He flung himself upon a bed, for he was at the end of his strength; but he did not weep, for in such a condition one does not weep. The priest was weeping, and, as yet, he had not said one

[1] "Many of those who interested themselves in the cause of the peasants paid for their sympathy with disgrace and ruin: Racine, Fénelon, Vauban, were examples of this. La Fontaine was more fortunate, but not less outspoken. See the fable of 'Death and the Woodman.'"—J. A.

word. At last he spoke to him of God, as you know he can speak. They were together for six hours, and then, to complete the sacrifice, the priest led him to the church of those good Capucines where they were repeating vigils for the dear son. The Maréchal came in almost falling, trembling,—rather dragged and pushed along than on his legs. His face was scarcely to be recognised. M. le Duc saw him in this condition, and wept as he described it to us at Madame de la Fayette's. The poor Maréchal then at last returned to his little room: he is like a condemned man. The king has written to him. Nobody sees him. Madame de Monaco is entirely unconsolable; so is Madame de Louvigny, for the reason that she is not afflicted. Do you not wonder at her good fortune? Here in one moment she is Duchesse de Grammont. The Comtesse de Guiche behaves with great propriety. She weeps when they tell her of the messages and excuses her dying husband sent to her. She says, 'He was amiable; I should have loved him passionately if he had loved me a very little. I suffered his indifference with pain,—his death affects me and fills me with pity. I always hoped that perhaps his feeling for me might change.'"

All this is sincere, and written with true feeling.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE CHAPTER.

WHATEVER else she writes about, all Madame de Sévigné's letters at this time begin and finish in one strain, — urging, entreating, advising, persuading her daughter to join her at Paris. Madame de Grignan, who seemed in no hurry to obey her mother's summons, gave the expense of the journey as an excuse. Madame de Sévigné was deeply hurt, and writes a somewhat sarcastic letter to her who is wisdom and reason and philosophy in one—recalling the enormous sums spent at Aix, in comedies, in *fêtes*, in diversions, and banquets of every sort. She will try to submit to accept the *rôle* of an extravagant, unreasonable parent expecting impossibilities, and to look upon it all as a penance inflicted by Heaven; but those are depths, she says, which take away all the gladness of life. At last, after much demur, the Grignans arrive upon the scene.

It is no very grateful task to inquire into the conditions of the happiness and the unhappiness which this mother's devoted absorption in her daughter gave rise to. It has been said that the two could not live together in any peace, and people have again and again mistrusted

their sincerity. It is, I think, evident enough all through this correspondence that they loved each other, truly, devotedly. But it is not always those who love each other most who escape the jars and trials of love itself. Madame de Sévigné seems to have been in a somewhat morbid and susceptible condition,—to have been perhaps unreasonable in her demands and anxieties about this time, and perhaps also she realised only too well, now that she had lived a year in Provence, what were the dangers and overhanging shadows of the house; and her eagerness to bring her daughter to Paris and to further her worldly success was but a very natural desire to avert the ruin which seemed to her impending. Her constant warnings and entreaties may have given offence. When Madame de Grignan came at last, it seems as if the two were out of tune. "When you *choose* you can be adorable," writes the poor mother from Livry that summer. "I must indeed be well persuaded of the solid foundation of your affection for me, since I am still alive." And again, "The excesses of liberty which you give me wound my heart." This one letter only remains written to Madame de Grignan in the summer of 1674, during a temporary absence. Nor is it till the 27th of May 1675 that the correspondence begins again; but, meanwhile, there are one or two letters to Bussy and his daughter, and one to the Comte de Guitaut. There is a business letter from the Abbé, mentioning a wound which the young Marquis de Sévigné has received in the war, and threatening a farmer that he will be renounced for ever unless, under these circumstances, he pays his rent.

Madame de Sévigné is ill at this time, and threatened

with that mysterious and universal malady, *vapours*. A pretty little note of Madame de Grignan's on the subject sounds genuine somehow. "Thank you for thinking of me," she wrote to Bussy, "to pity me for my mother's illness. I am glad that you know how my heart is touched by anything that can happen to her. It seems to me that this is the best part of myself." There is also a correspondence about the marriage of Bussy's daughter with the Marquis de Coligny (the poor young bridegroom), who died so soon after, and who was so quickly forgotten.

"I think I am mad not to have written to you sooner about my niece's marriage," says the Marquise; "but I am in reality as a mad woman, and this is the one good reason that I can give you. My son is going away in three days to the army, my daughter in a few more goes to Provence. It is not possible that, with such separations, I should be able to keep before me what I possess of good sense. Take pity on me, therefore, and believe that among all my own tribulations I feel the injustice which has been done to you. I approve entirely of the alliance with M. de Coligny: it is an establishment which appears suitable for my niece."

Madame de Grignan having finally departed, the correspondence begins again. "Ah, what a day is that one which opens absence! How has it seemed to you? To me it has brought all the bitterness and the sorrow I apprehended."

There is something almost of a great composer's art in the endless variations and modulations of this lady's fancy. She laments, she rejoices, she alters her note, her key; she modulates from tears to laughter, from laughter to wit. She looks round for sympathy, tells

the stories of the people all about her, repeats their words, describes their hopes, their preoccupations. Then she remembers her own once more, and repeats again and again, in new words from fresh aspects, the fancies and feelings which fill her heart. No wonder Madame de Grignan valued such letters, and prized them, and kept them safe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREAT GENERAL.

THE July of the year 1675 was a month of pouring rain, followed by extreme heat. Madame de Sévigné describes a procession from St Geneviève to Nôtre Dame, in which a sacred reliquary was carried by twenty men dressed in white, with bare feet, preceded by an archbishop and an abbé blessing everybody right and left, and by 150 monks, also barefooted, and followed by the whole Parliament dressed in red, and various companies. The provost and the town councillors were left at St Geneviève as hostages for the safe return of the relics. The reason of this procession was to invite the return of fine weather, and to cause the rain to cease. It seems that the weather became settled just before the procession started, and it was therefore supposed that any extra virtue left over from the ceremony went to bring back the king from his campaign.

The procession, whatever its merits may have been, did not avert the great disaster which so soon befell the king's armies, and of which the news shortly reached them all in Paris, spreading universal consternation.

The account of Turenne's death is one often quoted and referred to.

"Let us speak a little of M. de Turenne. Do you not wonder that we should find ourselves happy to have re-crossed the Rhine? and that which would have shocked us if he had been in the world, now seems a piece of prosperity, because we have him no longer. See what a difference comes from the loss of one man alone. Listen to what seems to me very fine. It strikes me as if reading Roman history. Saint Hilaire, lieutenant-general of artillery, made M. de Turenne, who had been always galloping until then, to stop short, in order that he might show him a battery. It was as if he said, 'Sir, I pray you stop a little, for it is here that you are to be killed.' Then the cannon-ball comes and carries off the arm with which Saint Hilaire is pointing out the battery, and strikes M. de Turenne at the same moment. The son of Saint Hilaire flings himself on to his father, and begins to cry and to weep. 'Be silent, my child,' the father says, and he shows him M. de Turenne stiff and dead. '*That is what you have to weep for; that is what is irreparable.*' And without heeding himself he begins to bemoan this great loss. M. de Rochefoucauld weeps himself, admiring the man's generosity."

There is a further account, of which the first part is somewhat melodramatic, where the company outvies itself in lamentations, but the end is simple and full of truth.

"My daughter, I am really going to speak to you again of Monsieur de Turenne. Madame d'Elbœuf, who is spending some days with the Cardinal, her brother, begged me to dine with them both to talk over their affliction. Madame de la Fayette came too. We did exactly that which we had intended: our eyes were not dry the whole evening. Madame d'Elbœuf had a divinely well-painted portrait of the

hero, whose suite had arrived at eleven o'clock. All these poor people were in tears, and already dressed in black. Three gentlemen from amongst them came forward, whom the sight of this portrait almost killed. There were heart-breaking cries,—no one could say one word: his valets, his lackeys, his pages, his trumpeters—all were weeping, and made the others weep too. The first who was able to speak answered our sad questions, and gave us the narrative of his death. He had wished to go to confession, and whilst he was closeted he had given his orders for the evening: he was to take the Communion the following day, Sunday, which was the day he thought he should give battle. He mounted his horse on the Saturday at two o'clock, after having eaten; and as he had a great many followers, he left them all thirty feet off from the height which he wished to reach, and said to little D'Elbœuf, 'My nephew, stay there; you do nothing but hover round me, and make me conspicuous.' M. d'Hamilton who was near the spot whither he was going, said, 'My lord, come this way; they are firing in the direction towards which you are going.' 'Sir,' said he to him, 'you are right; I have no wish whatever to be killed to-day; that will be the best way.' He had scarcely turned his horse when he saw Saint Hilaire, hat in hand, who said to him, 'My lord, cast your eyes on that battery which I have just had placed.' M. de Turenne turned; and in one instant, without being stopped, his arm and his body were shattered by the same shot which carried off the arm and hand which held Saint Hilaire's hat. This gentleman, who was still looking at him, didn't see him fall; the horse carried him on to where he had left little D'Elbœuf; he had not yet fallen; but he was bent head downwards on the saddle. At that moment the horse stops, the hero falls into the arms of his men; twice he opens wide both eyes and his mouth, and then remains motionless for ever: he was dead, one half of his heart carried off. There were screams and tears: M. d'Hamilton stopped the noise, and removed little D'Elbœuf, who had thrown himself on the body, refusing to leave it, and who was swooning with anguish.

They cover the body with a mantle and carry it on a litter noiselessly : a carriage comes and conveys him to his tent. It was there that M. de Lorges, M. de Roze, and many others, thought they should die of grief; but they had to control themselves, and to think of the great matters which lay on their shoulders. There was a military service given him in camp, where tears and cries formed the true mourning, besides which all the officers wore crape scarves. All the drums, too, were covered with crape, and only beat one roll, trailing bayonets, and arms reversed. One cannot realise the tears of a whole army without feeling deep emotion. . . . When the corpse left the army, a new despair began, and wherever it passed, one heard only wailings. At Langres they went to meet him in mourning dress, to the number of two hundred or more, followed by the populace, and all the clergy fully robed. A solemn service took place in the town, and in one moment they had all agreed to share the expense, which amounted to five thousand francs, for they followed the corpse to the next town, and wished to pay for everything. What do you say to these natural signs of a feeling founded upon extraordinary merit? He is to arrive at St Denis to-night or to-morrow: all his people go to meet him two leagues away."

After Turenne's death, it being impossible to replace him, it was agreed that the king should make eight generals in the place of this one. People in those days called their eight generals "change for Monsieur de Turenne."

It is during this autumn that Madame de Sévigné again writes to Bussy complaining of "vapours." "That good health which you have seen so triumphant has received attacks of which I am humiliated, as though I had been affronted. As for my life," she says, "you know it well enough. It is passed with five or six friends whose society pleases, in a thousand duties

which one is compelled to attend to, and which are no trifling matter. But that which vexes me is that in doing nothing the days pass on: one grows older—one dies. I find this very evil." Then she returns to the death of Turenne once more—to that cannon fired by chance, which has taken him alone among ten or twelve. "*For myself, who see Providence in all things, I see that cannon loaded from all eternity.* I see everything leading M. de Turenne to its mouth, and I find nothing hurtful in all this, supposing his conscience to be in a good condition. What would he have? He dies in his glory: his reputation could gain nothing more. In that moment he enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing his enemies retreat—of reaping the fruit of his three months' endeavours. Sometimes, in the course of a long life, the star grows dim." Was this the thought which induced Cardinal de Retz, Madame de Sévigné's faithful old friend and connection, to retire from the world about this time, to give up his cardinal's hat, to take leave of all his friends, of busy life and its complicated interests? De Retz is spoken of as by far the ablest politician of the day, but he had missed his mark somehow,—others were preferred to him. After the death of the hero of war, "he of the breviary" also wishes to depart the world of politics and fashion, and in going seems to have wished to bestow various possessions upon his most favoured friends. There is much talk of a certain silver casket or *cassolette* which Madame de Grignan refuses, and which her mother entreats her to receive with some little graciousness. It is said that in all loyalty and friendship Madame de Sévigné hoped much for her grandchildren — for Pauline his god-daughter—from the succession of the Cardinal; that

Madame de Grignan alternately yielded to and rebelled against her mother's well-meaning endeavours for bringing her into nearer relations with the Cardinal. One might imagine many reasons which may have set Madame de Grignan against him, some of them more reasonable and perhaps more to her credit than that curious and unamiable jealousy which ever set her against those friends dearest to her mother.

CHAPTER XIX.

BASSETTE AND HOCA.

"My hair stood on end," cries our Marchioness, "when the coadjutor told me that at Aix the other day he found M. de Grignan playing at *hoca*. What a madness! In God's name, do not allow it." The rage for *hoca* which then existed was something besides a mere passion for gambling. These extravagant people, all wanting money, none able to earn it, tried to make a living out of games of chance, and played from dire necessity. There seems to have been less excuse for others—the Queen, for instance, who "lost twenty thousand pieces, and missed her Mass one morning before mid-day." The King said, "Madame, let us calculate how much this would come to in a year." There is an odd outburst in one of Madame de Sévigné's letters, where she is speaking of the romantic episode of Madame de la Sablière and her devoted La Fare, who was not, alas! faithful to the end. Here is Madame de Sévigné's epitaph upon the grave of a friendship which should have lasted to the end:—

"You ask me what has caused the dissolution of continuity between La Fare and Madame de la Sablière. It is

bassette. Could you have believed it? This is the name by which infidelity has declared itself: it is for that prostitute *bassette* he has quitted that religious adoration. The moment had come when this passion was to cease, to pass to another object. Who would have believed that *bassette* would have proved the road to salvation for any one? Ah! it has been well said there are five thousand roads that lead to Paradise. Madame de la Sablière noticed from the first this distraction, this desertion. She examined the bad excuses, the insincerities, the pretexts, the embarrassed explanations, the forced conversations, the impatiences to be gone from her, the journeys to St Germains, where he was in the habit of playing, the weariness, the not knowing what to say next; and at last, when she had well observed this eclipse which was falling, and the strange phenomenon that was gradually hiding so much bright love, she took a resolution. I know not what it cost her; but, in short, without quarrelling, without reproach, without excitement, without dismissing him, without explanations, without wishing to confound him, she herself eclipsed herself; and although she did not give up her house, where she sometimes returns even now, and without having said that she was renouncing all, she has found herself so well established at the Incurables that she spends nearly all her life there, feeling with pleasure that her illness is not like that of the sick people whom she serves. The superiors of the house are charmed with her wit; she governs them all. Her friends go and see her; she is always good company. La Fare plays *bassette.* This is the end of this great affair, which drew the attention of every one. This is the road God had marked out for this pretty woman. She did not say, with crossed hands, 'I wait for grace.' How weary am I of these discourses! . . . She learns the returns, the *bassettes,* the uglinesses, the pride, the grief, the misfortunes, the splendours,—everything is of use. Everything is made to serve by the Great Workman. . . . My child, this letter becomes infinite: it is a torrent that I cannot keep back. Answer me in three words. Rest yourself, keep yourself, and let me

see you and embrace you again with all my heart. That is the aim of my wishes. I do not understand any change in solid friendship, wise and well founded; but as for love —ah! that is too violent a fever to last. Farewell, my very dear and very loyal one. I like that word."

A good deal has been said in these pages, but perhaps scarcely enough, of the desperate extravagance of the Grignan family, whose magnificence was not to be paid for even by an income such as theirs. The little eldest daughter, of whom her grandmother wrote such affecting descriptions, had now attained the mature age of five years, and her anxious parents began to look forward to her future. Whether it was for the sake of the little son of three, or in order to pay the parent's debts at *hoca*, or to keep Lachan the valet in wigs, it is certain that poor little Marie Blanche's portion was needed by her splendid family; and it was arranged that the child should be disposed of in the most convenient and cheapest fashion. In vain Madame de Sévigné protested. Marie Blanche was to be a nun, pious and economical. It may be said, in bare extenuation of her parents' conduct, that such arrangements belonged to the custom of the day, and to the tradition of a family which counted a saint among its many distinctions. But the poor little girl was no saint. She seems to have been clever, loving, jealous, attaching by nature, with little turn for convent life. "My heart aches for her," says the grandmother; but her remonstrances lack the vigour of irresistible indignation; they are far too gentle, too gracefully worded. In 1680 Madame de Grignan made a retreat to the very convent at Aix where her little daughter was immured. "You do not mention little D'Adhémar," says Madame

de Sévigné; "did you not allow her a tiny corner from which the child might peep at you?"

For sixty years to come, the poor little D'Adhémar was destined to live in her unwilling captivity; nor was she freed till her life ended at sixty-five, by which time her cold-hearted mother and the sons for whom she schemed were dead, and the house of Grignan and its meretricious splendours were laid low, and the palace built up of daughters' dowries, of the younger sons' portions, passed into the hands of strangers.

There were worse things happening in 1675 than the cloistering of a helpless child, though, for the matter of that, cruelty in a parent seems perhaps the most wicked of wicked things. It was in this year that the rebellion in Brittany broke out afresh, and was put down with monstrous retaliation, that cannot be read of even now without indignation.

Madame de Sévigné, whose own affairs imperatively demanded her presence at the Rochers, hesitated for some time before she dared face the journey in the disturbed state of the country. The farmers were unable to pay their rents; they were overwhelmed with taxes and impositions; the country people were uprising; the fields were uncultivated, the farms unlet. The intrepid old Abbé urged his niece to delay no longer: aged as he was, he was prepared to accompany her, and to set to work for her service. Some of his letters written at this time are still extant, and full of shrewd prudence and patient ability.

Madame de Sévigné started by water in order to vary the journey, which was far less alarming than she had anticipated. They floated from one pleasant old town to another, from chateau to chateau, from welcome to

welcome. Occasionally they stuck in the mud. After some difficulties and adventures, they finally reached their home, which was standing peaceful and secure amidst a sea of troubles. Whatever may have been the faults of the Duc de Chaulnes, he was a good friend to his friends. He protected the widowed Marquise, kept the armies from the gates, the oppressors from her door: all was peace at the Rochers, although elsewhere, and all about the country, far and near, the cry of the despoiled and martyred inhabitants went up to heaven.

When Madame de Sévigné does speak of the troubles of her unhappy province, it is to the purpose. On the 13th of October she writes—

"You say with good reason that dates do nothing to make delightful the letters of those we love. Good heavens! are public events so dear to us? Your health, your family, your least action, your sentiments, your bubbles from Lambesc,—these are what really touch me; and I believe that you are in the same mind, so that I do not hesitate to speak to you of the Rochers, of Mademoiselle du Plessis, of my alleys, my woods, my affairs, of the Bienbon and of Copenhagen, when the occasion presents itself. Everything is important to me that comes from you, even to your strips of worsted-work. I am glad to know everything. If you want any more needles to work with, I have some admirable ones. Yesterday I did infinite needlework; it was as dull as my company. I only work when they all come in. As soon as I am alone I walk, I read, I write, and a Du Plessis no more hinders me than does Marie. Heaven gives me the grace not to hear a word she says. . . ."

Then she continues—

"Would you have news of Rennes? There are now five thousand troops there, for others have come from Nantes.

They have laid a tax of a hundred thousand crowns upon the inhabitants, and if this sum is not produced in four-and-twenty hours, it is to be doubled and exacted by the soldiers. They have hunted out and banished the inhabitants of one whole great street, and forbidden, upon pain of death, that any of these are to be sheltered or taken in, so that all these miserable people were to be seen; women lying-in, old men, children wandering in tears at the gates of the town, not knowing where to go, nor how to find food, nor where to sleep. The day before yesterday a pedlar was broken on the wheel: he had begun the dance and the pillage of the stamps. He was quartered after his death, and his four parts exposed at the four corners of the town. He, dying, said that the Commissioners of Stamps had given him twenty-five crowns to begin the sedition, and nothing else would he say. Sixty burghers have been taken, and to-morrow they are to begin the hangings. This province is a fine example for the others—above all, to teach respect for governors and governesses, and not to say rude things to them, and not to throw stones into their gardens."

De Quincey's celebrated passage about incivility was not then written, but surely this is plain speaking for 1675. Again she writes in "bitter irony," as Walckenaer says—

"You speak very pleasantly of our miseries. We are no longer so much broken on the wheel as we were. One of us a-week only, to keep justice in hand. It is true that mere hanging now seems a refreshing process. I have quite a new idea of justice since I am in this country. Your galley-slaves seem to me a society of honest folks, who have retired from the world to lead a peaceful existence."

The Bienbon seems to have set to work immediately on his arrival at the Rochers.

"The Bienbon is ever the Bienbon," writes her niece. "His are speaking deeds. The obligations I owe to him are

innumerable, and that which makes me even more grateful for them is his constant friendship and affection for you, and the zeal he has for your interests. . . . I do not dare think about seeing you: when this hope enters my heart and its realisation is so far away, it gives me too much pain. . . . You assure me that you are well. God grant it, my best one. . . . As for me, I am in perfect health. You would like my sobriety and my exercise; seven hours of bed like a Carmelite. This rigid life pleases me."

CHAPTER XX.

FIDÈLE AND OTHER FRIENDS.

The Bienbon was not the only good friend at work trying to serve the Marquise with her complicated affairs; another who remained in Paris was D'Haqueville, who for many years appears in her correspondence, active, busy, always ready. "He is *those D'Haquevilles*," says the grateful lady; "so many are his good deeds that one man could not suffice to them. Write to *them*, my daughter, in all confidence; their kind hearts suffice to everything. . . . He only loves those who overwhelm him," she continues. "Let us overwhelm him."

"You do not tell me," she asks a few days later, "if you have been so well treated in your Assembly as to be allowed to send the king no more than your usual gift; ours is augmented. I could have beaten that gaffer Boucherat [the Chancellor], when I heard of this augmentation. I do not think half of it can be paid. The States are opened tomorrow at Dinan. All this poor Parliament is ill at Vannes. Rennes is a deserted town. The taxes and the punishments have been cruel. . . ."

Then she passes to her own affairs. There is a pleasant

apparition of a little dog breaking in to relieve all this gloom, and to divert their minds. The dog is a present from a friend and neighbour, Madame la Princesse de Tarente,—a curious character, and at this time a constant companion of Madame de Sévigné. She was Amelia of Hesse, daughter of the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, and she was aunt to Madame,—the second Madame. She had been married to the Duc de la Tremouille, Prince of Tarente, who died in 1672, leaving her with a son and a beautiful daughter, who was then at the Court of the King of Denmark. The parent princess is described as having a heart of wax, which seems a questionable compliment; but for Madame de Sévigné the heart was made of more lasting material, and to her life's end Madame de Tarente proved a true and faithful friend.

Fidèle was the little dog, the rival of Marphise, who had been left in Paris, and who was not to be allowed to know of Fidèle's existence. Fidèle was a little perfumed creature, with silky ears, "soft breath," blond coat,—the gift of the impetuous princess to her friend. He eats bread, he attaches himself to Madame de Sévigné; she fears she may succumb to his charms, although she has vowed never to love any dog but Marphise. St Martin's summer burns on, and her continuous walks are protracted. She does not know the use of an arm-chair, and spends the hours alone in these alleys, followed by a servant. She comes home when night is falling, and the fire and the tapers have brightened the room. She fears the twilight when no one speaks. She is happier in the woods than alone in her room. Their great vastness suits her better than the weariness of an easy-chair. One can understand her depression;

sorrows are brooding on every side, stories of cruelties and tortures; her son away, her affairs in confusion. "As for your poor little brother, I know not where he has been hidden; for these three weeks past he has not written to me. . . . Every one believes him to be here. In truth, his fortunes are sad."

Madame de Tarente, who treated her own children with German severity, used to blame Madame de Sévigné for her indulgence to her son. It is true that young Sévigné gave good grounds for complaint and displeasure at times. For the present he had entirely disappeared, and caused no little anxiety to his mother by neither writing nor rejoining her, nor giving any sign of existence. Here is a pleasant description of his resuscitation :—

"As I was walking on my terrace the day before yesterday, what should I discover at the end of the mall?—the *Frater*, who, when he saw me, immediately knelt down upon both knees, feeling so guilty at having been three weeks singing matins underground that he dared not approach me in any other way. I had resolved to speak seriously to him, but I knew not where to find my anger, I was so glad to see him. You know what a delightful companion he is. He kissed me a thousand times; he gave me the worst reasons in the world, which I accepted as good ones. We talk a great deal, we read, we walk together, and thus we shall finish the year. . . . My letter was hardly gone," she says, "when eight hundred men arrived at Vitré. The princess is ill pleased. It is true that they are but passing, but they live, by my faith! as if they were in a conquered country.

Black fancies are flitting in and about her woods, although, now that her son is home, her mind is relieved of one great anxiety. But the state of Brittany is still full

of misery and consternation. The bishop—the mitred linnet, as she calls him—has come back, transported with delight at the king's goodness and the polite attentions he has himself received, quite heedless of the ruin of the province which he brings home so agreeably; and announcing that it is out of confidence and affection that his Majesty is sending 8000 men to invade the place.

"Thank you, my child, for remembering the *paterno nido*," she writes again. "Alas! our *château en Espagne* would be to see you in this one. What joy! and why should it be so impossible?" Then she describes her reading. Her favourite Nicole seems to have stood her in good stead during this anxious time; she divides her life between the 'Essais de Morale' and her daughter's letters, of which the Bienbon is allowed to hear choice passages, which "transport him;" so also is a "little person" without a name, staying in the chateau, admitted to this privilege. She is but fifteen. She seems to have been thought of as a suitable *parti* for the Baron, but she is only a child, and the idea is abandoned. She eats "beurrées" so long as to reach from January to Easter; she enjoys three green apples with her brown bread after dinner, and laughs and chatters, and delights them all with her gaiety. So the time passes. The whole party are thinking of a return to Paris when evil days befall the poor lady.

CHAPTER XXI.

ILLNESS.

Now and then signs of weariness had begun to appear in her letters. Madame de Sévigné quotes a friend's saying—"That which I do wearies me, that which I leave undone wears me." She seems to have wandered, restless and uneasy, along her alleys late into the evening. Chill, and depression, and anxiety of mind may have brought illness in their train. It was in February 1676 that she had her first illness—that one which she says destroyed in her the pleasant illusion of being immortal. "Guess, my child, what is the thing in the world which comes soonest, which goes away most slowly, which brings you nearest to convalescence, which drives you farthest from it; which seems to make you approach the most agreeable of conditions, and then prevents you from enjoying anything in the world." This state which the poor lady describes so gaily is nothing more nor less than rheumatic fever. "Since the fourteenth day," she says, "the fever has left me without pain; and in this blessed condition, and feeling as if I were quite able to walk, which is all that I desire, I find myself swelled in

every part—my feet, my legs, my hands, my arms; and this swelling, which is in truth my cure, is the cause of all my impatience, and would be that of my merit if I were more good."

All through this cruel illness the *Frater* is the best and most devoted of nurses to the poor patient in her yellow bed in the alcove where she lies. He watches her, comforts her, writes for her, has passages-at-arms with his sister concerning her medicines. There are two pages of such enthusiastic description as only a Frenchman could write, of certain powders of M. de l'Orme which the patient has been taking at his recommendation, and against which Madame de Grignan, with characteristic jealousy, inveighs from her distant province. The little person takes her share of the nursing. She reads to the sufferer and writes for her, and, above all, knows how to speak to her of Madame de Grignan.

Between them they seem to have made a wonderful cure of it, and Madame de Sévigné is actually able to date from Paris on the following 8th of April, where her friend and ally, the ponderous and philosophic Corbinelli, now appears to take his share in the attentions which the poor invalid requires. "I have just arrived. I hasten to assist this shuddering hand. It shall, when it so pleases, resume the pen," writes he. One does not wonder that Madame de Sévigné preferred "the little person" to a secretary with such imposing periods. Corbinelli seems to have been very highly thought of by all his friends, and it is perhaps absurd, after two hundred years, to complain of being bored by him. Nevertheless, his extreme reputation and morali-

ties, and his elaborate platitudes, are certainly irritating. He seems to have clung on to the skirts of admiring patrons. De Retz and others pensioned him; for a long time he inhabited the Hôtel de Carnavalet; and the 'Biographie Générale' states that he lived to be over a hundred, by which time his wisdom must have been something portentous. Meanwhile Madame de Sévigné, as soon as she was able to do so once more, wrote of him with the greatest veneration and respect.

She did not recover the use of her hand for some time,—not indeed until after her visit to Vichy, whither she went hoping for health from those healing waters and *douches;* and she also hoped for the possible presence of her daughter—her best medicine, she says, and her one infallible cure. Madame de Sévigné is not the only woman who has felt this longing. Other mothers there are, with daughters more like themselves, and with hearts to carry them across every obstacle to the help of those they love, who with greater sufferings have at least found greater consolation than our poor Marquise. Madame de Grignan did not come. She was reigning in state, and unable to leave her southern kingdom; and although Madame de Sévigné writes one appeal after another, no help reached her from Aix.

A friend, living in a beautiful garden herself, tells me that the house in the garden where Madame de Sévigné lived at Vichy is still shown. The garden is planted full of tall white lilies, and the house is a low stone house standing detached in its parterre. The waters of Vichy sparkle right into the letters, which are written in delightful gaiety and pleasantness of spirit. She de-

scribes the pretty moor where the shepherds of Astrea might still be seen, she thinks, if people were to look hard enough. As for the waters, "Ah, how nasty they are!" cries the lady.

"By six o'clock one is at the fountain," she says. "Everybody is there: one drinks, one makes wry faces; for imagine to yourself boiling water with a most disagreeable taste of saltpetre. One wanders round, coming and going, and walking here and there; one hears Mass; one talks confidentially of the effect of the waters. Nothing else is thought of until twelve o'clock. Then at last comes dinner, and after dinner one goes to some one's. To-day it was to me they came. Madame de Brissac played at *hombre* with Saint Herens; Plancy the *chanoine* and I read Ariosto. . . . Some girls of the country came with a flute, dancing a *bourrée* to perfection. Here it is that the gipsies flourish: they cut capers, to which the priests object a little. At last, at five o'clock, one wanders out into the delicious country; at seven we sup lightly; at ten o'clock we go to bed. Now you know as much as I do.

"Madame de Brissac gave herself out for ill to-day, and remained in bed, beautiful enough and frizzed enough to turn everybody's head.[1] I wish you could have seen the use she made of her sufferings—of her eyes, of her sighs, of her arms, of her hands languishing on the counterpane, of the situation and of the compassion she wished to excite. I was overcome with tenderness and admiration as I gazed on the performance, which seemed to me so fine: my riveted attention must surely have given satisfaction,—and remember that it was for the Abbé Bayard, for Saint Herens, for Montjeu and Plancy, that the scene was got up. You seem to me a mere bungler. When I remember with what simplicity you are ill, the rest you give your pretty countenance,—in short, what a difference! . . ."

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1 "Coiffée à coiffer tout le monde."

Then comes the cure :—

"After that excellent performance—the illness—we are now privileged to witness a convalescence full of languor, which is so well arranged upon the stage that several volumes would be requisite for me to describe all the merits I discover in this masterpiece."

This lovely duchess was the sister of whom Saint Simon writes with so much fraternal admiration and affection. It is fortunate that family eyes do not look through the same focus as strangers' eyes. The letters go on to describe Madame de Sévigné's own symptoms as a Frenchwoman only would describe them, and then comes a reflection :—

"Age and a little illness," she says, "give one time to think a great deal. You ask me if I am devout. Alas! no; but it seems to me that in some measure I am more divided from what is called the world; but then that which I take from the public I give to you, so I advance little in the realm of self-abnegation."

She gives a curious incidental description of Montespan, the Cleopatra of those days, in her barge going to meet her victorious lover at Fontevrault. The barge is lined with crimson damask, with a thousand ciphers and emblems of France and Navarre. Never was anything more splendid. The expense must have been more than a thousand *écus;* but it was all more than paid for by a letter from the beauty to the king. Then comes an idyl :—

"I found this morning by the fountain a good Capuchin monk. He saluted me very respectfully. I also curtseyed to him, for I respect the livery he wears. He began by

speaking to me of Provence, of you, of M. de Roquesante, of having seen me at Aix, of the sorrow my illness caused to you. I should have liked you to see what this good Father was to me from the moment he seemed so well informed."

Some painter might, I think, make a pretty little picture of the fountain, of the smiling lady, of the humble monk, of the summer-time.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT COURT AND ELSEWHERE.

The letters written after this bad illness are not those which make us love Madame de Sévigné most, although they are among the most brilliant and sparkling in the collection. Her description of La Brinvilliers's death and torture jars upon our modern (and let us hope our genuine) sentimentalism. Madame de la Brinvilliers had poisoned her father, her child, her husband, and confessed to a score of others murdered. The good Marquise went out with all Paris, and waited on the Pont Neuf to see the wicked one led by to execution. All she saw was a little white cap passing by in a tumbril. Her next expedition was to the Court, where, as yet, no echoes of heavy tumbrils were to be heard, and where everything was splendid and supreme,—the king, the queen, Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle, all the princes and princesses, Madame de Montespan, all her suite, the courtiers, the ladies in the fine apartment of the king, with the divine furniture.

"One is not crowded,—one passes from place to place; a game of *reversis* gives countenance to the assemblage. The king is by Madame de Montespan, who holds the cards,

Monsieur, the queen, Madame de Soubise; Dangeau and company, Langlée and company. . A thousand pieces are scattered on the cloth. There are no other markers. I watched Dangeau play, and wondered at our own stupidity compared to him. He is only thinking of his business, winning while the others lose, neglecting nothing, profiting by everything—never distracted, in a word; his excellent conduct defies fortune. Thus 200,000 francs in ten days, 100,000 louis in a month—all this is written in the book of his receipts."

Then she describes Montespan's wonderful beauty—eyes, lips, complexion:—

"She is all dressed in French point-lace, with a thousand ringlets, two falling low from her temples upon her cheeks. She wears black ribbons in her hair, the pearls of the Maréchal de l'Hôpital among her curls, and diamond pendants of the greatest beauty, two or three lappets, no *coiffe*—in a word, a triumphal beauty to dazzle all ambassadors. People had complained that Madame de Montespan kept the king away from those who had a right to enjoy his presence. She has now given him back to France, to the joy of every one—to the delight of the Court. Every day, from three to six, the king gives audience in an agreeable confusion, without confusion of everything that is most select: this lasts from three o'clock to six. When the couriers arrive, the king retires for a moment to read his letters, and then returns. Music is always sounding, which he listens to, and which adds to the completeness of the whole. He talks to the ladies who are used to this honour. At last the courtiers cease their play. Finally, at six o'clock, every one goes off in carriages—the king, Madame de Montespan, Monsieur, Madame de Thianges and the good D'Heudicourt on the step—that is to say, as if in Paradise. You know how these carriages are built; you do not see one another, all being turned one way. The queen follows in another, with the princesses, and every one troops after according to fancy. They float to

music on the canal in gondolas; they come back at ten to a play; midnight strikes; the *media-noce* is served. Thus Saturday was spent."

The courier's news was not what should have most added to the king's enjoyment. One place after another was being carried by the enemy, and the king's victorious armies were cutting a sorry figure. Madame de Sévigné follows the armies with interest. Her son and the Chevalier de Grignan are both engaged, and both are mentioned with honour. The Baron is distinguishing himself, and bent on distinctions which never come. He was present at the siege of Aire, which was carried by the French; and indeed its inhabitants do not seem to have been heroes, according to the account of the conquering Baron. "The nerves of their backs which serve to turn, and those which cause the legs to move and run away, were not restrained by the desire for glory." A little story of a conversation between the king and the upright and outspoken Montausier is to the honour of both of them. One morning the king read—

"In truth I think we shall not be able to relieve Philipsbourg, but I shall not the less be king of France."

M. de Montausier answered—

"'It is true, Sire, that you would still be king of France if they had taken Metz, Toul, Verdon, and the Franché Comté, and several other provinces which your predecessors were able to do without.' The courtiers all began to bite their lips at this, and the king, with very good grace, said—'I understand you very well, M. de Montausier: you mean that you think my affairs are going ill; but I find what you say very good, for I know what a true heart yours is for me.'"

"This is a true story," says Madame de Sévigné,

"and I think they both played their parts excellently well."

The Baron came home from the wars somewhat in disgrace, having turned his back wearily upon the fighting, and brought with him no distinction, but a rheumatism for his mother to nurse. This she speaks of, and of the dress of gold, upon gold embroidered with gold, and fretted with gold, given to Madame de Montespan, &c.; and of the serious illness of her cousin, Coulanges' wife, — all told in a bright succession of flashing words, and sparkling sentences not unlike the golden-gilt gold-embroidered stuff she describes.

The correspondence comes to a temporary end in December 1676. Madame de Grignan arrives in Paris to find her mother waiting dinner,—smoking broth, lighted tapers, blazing fire, "and the person in the world who loved her most tenderly" with arms open to receive her.

It was in 1677 that Madame de Sévigné, to her great delight, found herself installed in the Hôtel de Carnavalet, where there is room for all she loves,—for her daughter and her family—above all (as she says) for Pauline, the little granddaughter, whose poor baby fate was then hanging in the balance. Madame de Sévigné trembled lest the child should be sent after her sister into the dim Hades of convent life. Alas! we have but one poor life in this world, she pleads. Here is room for Pauline, and here is fine air, and a big courtyard, and a beautiful garden. She will have to go without *parquets* and little fashionable chimneys for the present, but they will be all together, and at their ease, in the beautiful home. Madame de Sévigné went to stay with her cousin, Emmanuel de Coulanges, while she

furnished and made ready. The arrangement seems to have given satisfaction to all parties.

"We hold her at last, that incomparable mother-beauty," writes the little, fat, cheerful man. "She is more beautiful, more incomparable than ever. Do you think that she came to us tired? Do you think she stayed in bed to rest after her fatigues? Nothing of the sort. She did me the honour to land at my door more beautiful, more refreshed, more radiant than I can describe; and since then she has been in a continual agitation, which does not in the least injure her health. She is well in body. As for her soul, it is, by my faith, altogether with you; and if it chances to revert to its beautiful shrine for a while, it is only to speak of that rare Countess in Provence."

The poor old Abbé is less fortunate: he has a fever and a cold, but he too shakes off his ills, and lives for ten years more to enjoy the beautiful home. As yet everything is chaos, "and the world and its elements are being divided anew," the lady says. She receives her friends in the courtyard, on the steps of their big carriages. La Rochefoucauld comes, the Princess de Tarente comes, Corbinelli remains for good on a mysterious regimen of melted gold and milk which has disagreed with him. Then, finally, the Grignans arrive,—daughters, brother-in-law, young Marquis and attendants: one can imagine them clattering in, under the big archway, and settling down in the many apartments and corridors. Some rooms open to the court; these are for the Chevalier de Grignan, the generous, kind brother-in-law, who is a martyr by gout. There is a quiet library now in the room where the family assembled,—a sort of panelled quiet broods over the place. The closet is shown where the letters were written—a dark and

sunless little room opening from a bedroom. The *parquets* are now there which were wanting to Madame de Sévigné's comfort, and the little fashionable chimneys she wished for. Were they added by her or by those who have come after? Along with her, many people inhabited the hotel at one time and another. Mademoiselle de Méri, the sick cousin, seems for a long while to have made her home there; the Chevalier de Grignan and others spent many months in the house; Corbinelli, the philosopher, stayed for years at a time. The jealous Madame de Grignan was jealous of Corbinelli among other people, and seems to have suspected him of wishing to deprive her of her mother's affections. Did she fear him as a step-father? One has more sympathy with this phase of the *belle* Madelonne's mind than with others less human, and indeed the admiring way in which Madame de Sévigné quotes her philosopher is certainly irritating to those who love her memory. The son of the house was also able to join the party for a time,—Charles de Sévigné, "the grey-bearded ensign," as he calls himself, much discontented with his slow advancement, and little caring for the life he had to lead. He was allowed but a brief space to cultivate his home affections, and was soon called away again to Luxembourg's army, which was now near Mons, where not long afterwards the battle of Denis was fought, in which the Baron greatly distinguished himself, though with small recognition. Notwithstanding Madame de Sévigné's prayers and loving entreaties, Pauline, the little granddaughter, was not with them—she had been left in the south in some convent school; but the two elder daughters of the house,

the Demoiselles de Grignan, daughters of the Count by his first marriage, with Angélique d'Angennes, were there making great friends (as who did not?) with Madame de Sévigné. The young ladies were heiresses in their own right: the eldest was Louise, the celestial daughter,—so Madame de Sévigné used to christen her; the second, Mademoiselle d'Aleyrac, as she was called, was the terrestrial daughter, not so much occupied with the joys of the next world as with present gaieties.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAMILY DISCUSSIONS.

For two years they were all together. Madame de Grignan's health was precarious; and Fagon, the great doctor, forbade her to return to the keen air of her home. The whole Grignan family seem to have spent the time more or less at the Hôtel de Carnavalet and at Livry. Any one who knows anything of French family life—its gaiety, its vehemence, its pleasant sociability, its sudden storms and tempests—can imagine what sort of home it was which all these people made in common. That storms were not unknown is very evident from the few letters which still exist dated from this time. There is one from the mother at Livry, sending back some carriage-horses, and commencing, "You should spare me the horrible remembrance of the last words you spoke—if I do not love you—if I am not glad to see you. . . ." And another to Bussy, in which the Marquise comments somewhat sadly on old age, and says she could correct herself of her faults if only she might live two hundred years, so as to become an admirable person.

Madame de Grignan may not have been altogether to

blame. One of Madame de Sévigné's biographers well describes her insatiable tenderness; but whatever her unreasonableness may have been, a word, a return, a caress, disarms her in an instant.

It is curious how, even now, two hundred years after her death, biographers still fall victims to the charm of Madame de Sévigné's personality. Walckenaer writes with something like enthusiasm. M. Mesnard is scarcely less fascinated by his heroine; and indeed it is impossible to resist her grace, her goodwill. When she does that which we disapprove, we feel personal pain and regret, as for a friend's failing.

If the Baron her son was rheumatic, lazy, and disgraced in 1677, in 1678 he retrieved his character brilliantly. Notwithstanding the declaration of peace, the Prince of Orange suddenly fell upon the French at Mons. After a brilliant engagement, in which an extraordinary number of people were killed and wounded, a conference between the leaders took place, in which Marshal Luxembourg was asked which was that squadron which had, during two whole hours, stood the fire of nine cannon-mouths? The Marshal replied that the squadron was that of the Dauphin's men-at-arms, and that it was commanded by M. de Sévigné. It is curious to mark the shuffling of the cards as one watches them dealt out again and again by Madame de Sévigné's pretty white hands. It is not long after this that she describes the great Luxembourg himself as arrested on suspicion of witchcraft, and driven off in his own carriage to the Bastille.

When the Grignan family returned to Provence in

the autumn of 1678, Madame de Sévigné found herself very lonely in her big empty house. She writes anxiously about her daughter's health — about Pauline, whom she loves so tenderly:—

"The good Abbé was telling me a little while ago that I ought to ask you for Pauline: he says that she would cheer me and amuse me, and that I am better able to bring her up well now than I ever have been. I was delighted with this suggestion of his. Let us put it by to ripen. We will think of it one of these days. I have an idea that you would not give her to me, that you have not a good enough opinion of me. My child, hide this thought from me, if you have it; for I feel that it is unjust, and that you do not really know me. It would be a delicious occupation to cherish all this little creature's wonderful ways. Mesdemoiselles de Grignan, do you not love her? You should write and tell me a thousand things, easily, without troubling yourselves; and above all, tell me how your dear step-mother is in health."

The pacific Sévigné had come home after his fighting, and made a journey to Brittany, by way of looking after his tenants. He was weary of the profession, of the distinctions once longed after, and he soon afterwards gave up the army, to his sister's extreme indignation. He also was thinking of marriage, not less to her indignation. One of the complaints urged against the poor young man is that he has a curious taste in wives, and falls in love with dowdy unsuitable ladies. His magnificent countess-sister and his aristocratic mother are in despair at the badness of his taste. Is it possible that he can appreciate *us*, they say, if he takes such extraordinary fancies?

Charles finally, when he was no longer young, when his chances of advancement were ended, when his

mother had begun to give up all hope of a suitable marriage, found a rich, high-born, and devoted young lady ready to share his small fortune; and although, as usual, Madame de Grignan's demands were such as almost to break off the match, Charles's sweet temper and generosity carried the day. From this marriage might be dated the happiness of his life. He loved his wife tenderly, and she returned his affection. Her name was Jeanne de Bréhat de Mauron.

But this was long after 1679, when Madame de Sévigné had many cares on her mind besides her son's want of good taste in marriage. Not the least among these are her daughter's difficulties and money embarrassments, and the load of debt and anxiety, which added to Madame de Grignan's physical exhaustion. Their all-powerful friend Pomponne, the Minister, was to have come to their help, when lo! Pomponne himself was disgraced. The account is curious.

"On Friday we had gone, as I have already said, to Pomponne—M. de Chaulnes, Caumartin, and myself. We found him and the two ladies, who gave us a delightful reception. The evening passed in conversation and at chess. But ah! what a checkmate was in store at Saint Germain! He set off thither, the first thing in the morning. . . . As for us, we did not leave till after dinner. The ladies remained at Pomponne; and Madame de Vins in particular loaded me with endless kind messages to you. It was thus necessary to *send* to tell them the bad news; and it was one of M. de Pomponne's own servants who appeared in the room at nine o'clock on Sunday morning. The man's demeanour was so strange, he was so extraordinarily changed, that Madame de Vins felt sure he had come to announce M. de Pomponne's death: on hearing that he was only in disgrace, she revived. As she recovered, she was able to

realise the misfortune, and went to break it to her sister. They started at once, leaving those poor little boys crying; and reached Paris at two in the afternoon, overwhelmed with sorrow. You can imagine their meeting with M. de Pomponne, and what they felt at seeing each other under conditions so different from what they had thought, only the evening before, were theirs. For myself, I heard the news through the Abbé de Grignan, and I own it cut me to the heart. As soon as it was evening, I went to the house—for they were not visible to ordinary visitors. On going in, I found them all there together. M. de Pomponne embraced me, without being able to say a word. The ladies could not check their sobs, nor I mine. If you had been there, my child, you would have cried too. It was a pitiful sight! Our sympathies were the deeper for the accident of our having said good-bye at Pomponne in so different a mood. It is quite impossible to describe the state they were in. Poor Madame de Vins, whom I had left so blooming, was unrecognisable — literally unrecognisable. A fortnight's fever would not have changed her more.

"You can imagine that I often go to see him. I was touched the other day when he appeared without any signs of sorrow or dejection. Madame de Coulanges had begged me to take her with me. He complimented her for remembering the unfortunate. But he did not dwell long on that strain, but passed on to something that might lead to a general conversation, which he made as agreeable as ever, without any affectation of gaiety, but speaking in a manner so manly, so simple, so exactly and happily touched by everything that was sure to command our appreciation, that he had no difficulty in attaining his end. It seemed that at last we were once more going to see the same perfect M. de Pomponne whom we knew of old. That first day, however, affected me. He had nothing to occupy him, and was beginning to realise life, and the true meaning of the slowness of time. For, owing to the way in which his time used before to be filled, life to him had been like a flow-

ing torrent. He was hardly aware of it, as it rushed by, without admitting a moment's pause."

Pomponne came of too good a stock not to show of what stuff he was made in the hour of trial. The energetic race of Arnaulds, whatever their varieties of opinion, carried out their convictions with unflinching courage and determination, in good and bad fortune alike. The story of Port Royal, so intimately associated with the Arnauld family—its growth, its liberal opinions, its final overthrow by the Jesuits, and the courageous protest of its aged martyrs for conscience' sake—is one of the most moving histories imaginable. Madame de Sévigné did not live to see these later persecutions, but her sympathy was openly avowed all along, and is said to have materially affected her favour at Court. She contributed to the Paris establishment. Renaud de Sévigné, her uncle, was also one of the principal benefactors of the institution, which he finally joined. It was to him that the Mère Angélique, on her deathbed, sent the touching message: "At length our good Lord has seen fit to deprive us of all. Fathers, sisters, disciples, children, all are gone. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Grief and sorrow, indeed, abound, but peace and resignation to His holy will abound yet more." This was in 1656, at the time of the first persecution. Pomponne was always faithful to his friends and relatives, and was able to help them in some degree. Some of them, when dispersed from Port Royal,[1] retired to his estate, M. de Saci among others, Pomponne's

[1] Sir James Stephen's account of Port Royal is so vivid as to carry one there, and almost to enable one to see what Madame de Sévigné saw with her own eyes.

cousin, — a man of wide influence and very holy character.

In November 1664, Madame de Sévigné, writing to Pomponne, mentions the story of poor Jacqueline Arnauld's signing the formulary:—

"I went to the Convent of Ste Marie, where I saw Madame your aunt, who seemed lost in divine ecstasy. She was assisting at the Mass, as if in a rapture. Madame your sister seemed to me pretty,—fine eyes, an intelligent countenance. The poor child fainted this morning. She is suffering very much. Her aunt is still kind as ever. Monsieur de Paris gave her a certain sort of authorisation, which won her heart: it was this which obliged her to sign this device of a formulary. I did not speak to either of them; M. de Paris had forbidden it. But here is one more instance of prejudice. The Sisters of Ste Marie said to me, 'At last, God be praised, He has touched the heart of that poor child.' She has put herself in the way of salvation and obedience.' From thence I go to Port Royal. I find a certain great solitary whom you know, who begins to say: 'Well, so the poor fledgling has signed. God has abandoned her. She has taken the fatal leap.' As for me, I nearly died of laughing as I thought of the effect of preconceived ideas. This is indeed humanity in its natural condition."

The laughing philosophy of the lady is no less a curious sensation than the more fervent feelings of the others.

"This Port Royal is a Thebaïde," she writes on a subsequent occasion,—"a Paradise, a desert, where the devotion of Christendom is collected together, and holiness spreads for a league in circumference. There are five or six Solitaires who live like the penitents of St John Climaques. The nuns are angels upon earth. Mademoiselle de Vertus is ending her life there with extreme resignation and incon-

ceivable suffering. She will not be alive in another month. Everything that serves to their necessities—the carters, the shepherds, the workmen—all is holy, all is modest. I confess to you that I was delighted to see this solitude, of which I have heard so much. It is a frightful valley, quite suitable to work out one's salvation in. I slept at Mesnil on my way back, and we returned here after again embracing M. d'Andilly. I think I shall dine to-morrow with M. de Pomponne, and it will not be without speaking of his father and of my daughter."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADAME DE LA FAYETTE AND OTHERS.

In 1679 Madame de Sévigné was about fifty-four years of age. From all accounts she seems to have been beautiful still and blooming. Six years later even she received an offer of marriage from the Duc de Luynes,[1] which, however, she could not be persuaded to accept. Her heart, her interests, her sympathies belonged to her children: her daughter's health already filled her with anxiety, and her correspondence is overflowing with most tender solicitude.

"If I had a heart of crystal," she writes, "in which you could read the sad and deep-felt pain which pierced me when you desired that my life should be composed of more years than yours, you would know clearly with what truth and ardour I also desire that Providence should not change the order of nature which caused me to be born your mother, and to come into this world very much before you. It is rule, it is reason, my daughter, that I should go before you."

Madame de Sévigné forbids her daughter to write, but continues herself to give her news,—honours, disgraces,

[1] He also was a friend and benefactor to Port Royal.

weddings, funerals, treats, tortures, Court scenes, and gaieties—the death of her old friend La Rochefoucauld, after a life of cruel suffering[1]—are all described in a bright torrent of flashing words, at once matter of fact, fanciful, brilliant, and amusing. Some part of it surprises, and perhaps shocks one, in a woman so faithful, so ready to weep with those who weep; but her heart is not the less warm because her pen runs away with her words.

In March 1680 she writes from Paris:—

"This is Wednesday, and M. de la Rochefoucauld still dead, and M. de Marsillac still afflicted, and so closely shut up that it seems as if he did not ever dream of leaving the house."

Of her old, close friend, bound to La Rochefoucauld by years of sympathy and devotion, she speaks with more feeling. Where will Madame de la Fayette find such a friend as he is again—such a companion! where find such gentleness, such pleasantness, such confidence, such consideration for her and for her sons? She is infirm; she is in her room; she cannot run the streets. M. de la Rochefoucauld was also sedentary, and nothing could be equal to the confidence and the charm of their friendship. "Think of it, my child," the mother continues; "you will find it is scarcely possible to experi-

1 "I was there yesterday. I found him crying aloud, his pain had reached so great a point. All his constancy was overcome. Not one good remained to him. The extremity of his suffering was so great, that he was beating the air in a violent fury. He filled me with pity. I had never before seen him in this condition. He begged me to tell you of it, and to assure you that people on the rack do not suffer more than he does during half his life, and that he longs for death as for a mercy-stroke."

ence a greater loss—one which time can do less to repair. I have not left my poor friend all these days; she did not join the crowding family; she needed some one to have pity on her."

In the many changes of life these two women were ever faithful to one another. Madame de la Fayette, ailing, suffering, faithful, and sincere, never changed in her affectionate devotion to Madame de Sévigné. They had known each other in their earliest youth; their lives had run side by side; they were well fitted to befriend each other. Madame de la Fayette loved Madame de Sévigné as much as she hated writing to her: hers was a silent heart, clear-sighted, not protesting over much, not fearing to speak the truth, warmly interested in the wellbeing of all those whose wellbeing concerned her friend. To be true, to be real, was Madame de la Fayette's aim in life; and this aim she fulfilled simply, somewhat austerely, but with a warm and generous fidelity of heart. "Is it not enough to *be?*" she used to say. Besides the works by which she is known, she helped La Rochefoucauld in his collection of 'Maximes.' It may have been through her influence that he, year by year, condensed them and simplified their form. Her own works were widely read at the time. 'La Princesse de Montpensier,' 'Zayde,' 'La Princesse de Clèves,' were published in her lifetime; after her death were printed 'Memoirs of the French Court' in 1686 and 1689, and her 'History of Henrietta of England.'

For twenty-five years the affection of La Rochefoucauld had lightened her life, already saddened and weighed down by constant ill-health. After his death she seems to have been very lonely. Madame de Sévigné

complained that servants robbed Madame de la Fayette as she lay helpless on her sick-bed. One other good friend and her director, Father Duguet of Port Royal, also assisted her in her last years. One hears little of her sons, who, let us hope, did not entirely abandon their mother. She died in 1693, three years before Madame de Sévigné.

It is hard to reproach the chronicler with too much brilliancy and vividness as one reads the account of the events of the year which followed Madame de Grignan's return to Provence. Here is a veil as it were uplifted, a glimpse into the unknown, into that which is no longer history:—

"Yesterday I went to the great Carmelites," she says, "with Mademoiselle, who had the good thought of bidding Madame de Lesdiguières to take me. We entered the holy place. I was charmed with the wit of Mother Agnès, who spoke of you, as knowing you through her sister. I saw Madame Stuart, beautiful and content. I saw Mademoiselle d'Epernon, who did not find me disfigured—more than thirty years had passed since we had met. She seemed to me horribly changed. The little Du Janet did not greet me; since three days she wears the white veil. She is a prodigy of fervent vocation. I am going to write to her mother about her. But what an angel [Madame de la Vallière] appeared in the end! for M. le Prince de Conti had detained her in the parlour. There, to my eyes, were all the charms we have formerly beheld. She was neither changed nor sallow. She is less thin, more happy; the same eyes, the same glances. Austerity, bad food, and little sleep have not wearied nor sunk them. The strange dress takes nothing from her grace nor her distinction. As for modesty, it is not less than when she gave a Princess de Conti to the world, but this is more than enough for a Carmelite. . . . M.

de Conti loves and honours her tenderly. She is his director. The Prince is devout, and will be like his father. In truth, this dress and this retreat are a great dignity for her."

Words more or less lively and indifferent seem to matter little: one episode which occurs not long after this, that of the Demoiselles de Grignan, is one which did not end in words only. It is difficult to forgive or explain. They were both rich, and to each of them did their father owe great sums of money. When Pauline, comparatively dowerless, was threatened with a cloister, her grandmother most certainly helped to save her from this condign fate; but when a question arose as to the vocation of the eldest daughter of the house, the young step-daughter of Madame de Grignan, Madame de Sévigné served God and mammon to the utmost of her power; there are no doubts, no protestations, only congratulations: they may be somewhat satirical at times, but there is no relenting, no hesitation. It is a happy stroke of chance—a lucky throw of the dice, by which Mademoiselle de Grignan has been persuaded to retire to pray for her family, and to bestow her dowry to fill its empty coffers. Madame de Grignan has not a little contributed to this happy result,—so Madame de Sévigné tells Bussy, who replies that *his* daughter is thankful that she has not so able a step-mother as Madame de Grignan, otherwise she too might be safely shut up in a convent. Finally, when the poor young lady's health failed, and she was obliged to leave the Carmelites, she returned home indeed, but never resumed her place in the world. She made a donation of all her possessions to her father, and lived a semi-cloistral and religious life. Sainte Grignan she is called by Madame de Sévigné, who

implies of herself long afterwards that the fault in her life—one which had rendered her hateful at times—was that she looked on blandly at wrong-doing in those she loved, but which she should have resented,—wrongs to which she would never have stooped herself. The younger, the terrestrial daughter of the house of Grignan, also left her father's home for her uncle's, and finally, after going to law with her family, married to everybody's disapprobation.

Madame de Grignan came to Paris about 1680, and remained with her mother for eight years; but before her arrival Madame de Sévigné paid a visit to Brittany, where business again required her presence. She was reluctant to go, but the wise old uncle urged her, and notwithstanding his great age, this faithful guardian prepared to accompany her. "My Bienbon" desires me to assure you that he is at your service," the mother writes. "I am greatly taken up by the care of him. Journeys are no longer for him what they formerly were." She dates from Blois, that most enchanting of old French towns,—writing romantically, she says, on the river-side. But though she has heard a thousand nightingales on her way, she is listening for those which her daughter can hear from her balcony in Provence.

From Nantes she writes:—

"I begin this letter to-day, because we receive our letters at ten o'clock in the morning, and the post goes out at six in the afternoon punctually; and now I am going to tell you something which will amuse you—it is, that the first time I read your letters I am so agitated that I do not see one half of what is in them. In reading them over again more at my leisure, I find a thousand things that I want to talk to you about. . . .

"I am here in the midst of all the worry of completing the whole accounts for nineteen years, of which my son had only made a rough draft. They try to make letters which I have written pass as receipts: it is pitiful to see the mean shifts to which a bad debtor will have recourse for a balance of £400. We are going to settle everything; we are looking to certain fines of alienation and sale of land held from us; we shall want £80 presently. We have plenty of people to advise us; the only thing that vexes me is to do harm: but when I play at drowning, and I ask myself which of us shall be drowned—M. de la Jarie or myself—I say without hesitating that it shall be M. de la Jarie, and that gives me courage."

She is at the end of her travels when she says, still writing from Nantes:—

"I am like Harlequin, who answers his letter before receiving it. I was yesterday at the Buron. I came home in the evening. I thought I must weep when I saw the condition of the place. Those used to be the oldest woods in all the world. My son during his journey caused the last strokes of the hatchet to fall upon them and lay them low. He even sold one last little copse which remained in great beauty. He received four hundred pistoles for it all, of which not one remained to him in a month. All those sad dryads that I saw yesterday, those ancient sylvans no longer knowing where to hide, those venerable crows established for two hundred years in the depths of their woods, the owlets in the gloom who announced by their cries the troubles of mankind,—all these poured out plaints which touched my very heart. Who shall say that some of these old oaks did not also speak, like that one in which Clarinda was concealed? This spot also was a *luogo d'incanto*, if ever one existed. I came home very sad. The supper which the president and his wife had prepared did not cheer me."

CHAPTER XXV.

OLD AND NEW GENERATIONS.

In these succeeding years there are few letters to quote from. The marriage of Charles takes place, as we have read, in 1683; and in the consequent divisions of property, Madame de Grignan, as usual, grasps at the larger share. Madame de Sévigné reluctantly enough seems to have torn herself from her daughter to pay a motherly visit to her daughter-in-law; but she seems afraid of making the elder lady jealous, and apologises for her journey and her visit to her son, and writes coldly of her daughter-in-law, who, however, in the end won a warm place in her heart.

The younger Madame de Sévigné is described as a delicate and nervous person, for whom the days were all too long. She, however, suited her husband, whose kindness and softness of heart specially fitted him for taking care of others, most of all of those who depended upon him. The young Marquise seems to have been only anxious to make the mother of the husband she loved feel at home in the old castle which had been ruled by her so long and so ably. "It is not possible to feel that there is any other mistress than myself in

this house," Madame de Sévigné writes to her daughter when describing the life at the Rochers. The Bienbon is there too, quite well, and calculating all day long. The days go by monotonously, though not unpleasantly.

"We are leading a quiet enough life here; I do not think, however, that more excitement would be any pleasanter for me. My daughter-in-law is only cheerful at times—she changes her moods a hundred times a-day without finding one to suit her. She is extremely delicate, she hardly takes any exercise, she is always cold; by nine o'clock in the evening she is quite worn out. The day is too long for her, and the necessity which she has for rest gives me my freedom, so that I may leave her free: this is a great pleasure to me. I cannot by any possibility feel that there is any other mistress in this house than myself. Although I do not trouble myself about anything, I find all my wants attended to as if by invisible orders. I take my walks alone, but I dare not go out in the twilight for fear of bursting out sobbing and crying; the dark would be bad for me in my present state. Even if I had sufficient strength of mind to enjoy it, I would sacrifice this mournful pleasure to the fear of vexing you. At present my health forbids it; then, again, it is you who have told me to take care of myself,—it is always you."

It was not until some years after Charles's marriage that the good Abbé departed this life, in 1687, full of age and honour. I have already quoted Madame de Sévigné's grateful tribute to the uncle to whom she owes the sweetness and the peace of her life. She writes to Bussy:—

"You too owe him any brightness I gave to your society; without him we should never have laughed together. You have to thank him for all my good-humour, my vivacity, the gift I had of sympathising with you, the intelligence which made me understand what you said, and guess at

that which you were going to say: in a word, the good Abbé, in withdrawing me from the abysses in which M. de Sévigné had left me, has rendered me that which I was, that which you found me,—worthy of your friendship and your esteem. I have deeply felt the loss of this beneficent source of the repose of my whole life. He died in seven days of a continued fever, as if he had been a young man with very Christian sentiments, which touched me deeply. His life lasted eighty years. He lived with honour; he died as a Christian. May God grant us the same grace! It was towards the end of August that I bitterly lamented his loss. I never should have left him if he had lived as long as I myself; but about the 15th or 16th of September, finding myself only too free, I determined to go to Vichy at least to cure my imagination."

Further on she describes giving up the pretty old Abbey de Livry, to which all her life she had returned, and always with new pleasure.

The good old Abbé went to his rest in 1687; in 1688 the whole of Europe was in arms against Louis XIV. The Prince of Orange was uprousing the land against the invader. The Protestants were crying out against the cruelty with which they were assailed. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes brought indignation, which had long been smouldering, to a crisis. Among other places, Philipsbourg, which had been taken by the Germans, was now again attacked by the French. The young Marquis de Grignan, Louis Provence, who was then sixteen years of age, was sent there at the head of a company, carefully chosen and equipped by his mother. Madame de Sévigné may have judged of her daughter's anxieties by her own. It is certain that while the danger lasted she would not leave Paris, but day by day despatched letters, with what comfort she

could collect, to the absent and terrified mother. Did she sleep at the post, as Madame de Coulanges declared, in order to get news the sooner? Perhaps she contented herself by remaining in Paris until the 1st of November, when she writes a joyful letter of good news. "Philipsbourg is taken; your son is safe." The little Marquis was safe, with a slight wound in the thigh, which only added to his newly gained distinctions. He now appears constantly in the letters, and is seen in his own person respectfully kissing his mother and his grandmother's hands. He is *fêted*, caressed, and welcomed by his friends and relations, and by Monsieur le Chevalier his uncle, so long an inhabitant of the ground-floor rooms in the Hôtel de Carnavalet. The little Marquis's presence must have brought much life and interest to the household of people whose own lives were growing sad and dreary. His grandmother and the suffering Chevalier seem to have enjoyed his brilliant youth. His grandmother throws herself with delightful gaiety into his adventures, and amusements, and ecstasies. Perennial Coulanges also seems to have been amusing himself, and attending a great Court ceremony at Versailles—an investiture of blue ribbons. The letter is one often quoted:—

"He told me that they began on the Friday: the first took their oaths with Court dresses and with collars on. Two marshals of France stayed over for Saturday. Marshal de Bellefonds was perfectly ridiculous, partly from modesty and partly from indifference. He had neglected to put bows at the knees of his page's costume, so that it had an air of veritable bareness. The whole troop were magnificent, M. de la Trousse among the best; but there was a tangle in his wig which obliged him to push what ought to

have been at the side far away behind, so that his cheek was all uncovered. He was always pulling at that which embarrassed him, and which would not come, and this caused him no little vexation. But along the same line M. de Montchevreuil and M. de Villars entangled themselves one to the other so furiously—the swords, the ribbons, the laces, the tinsel hangings were all mixed, confused, jumbled; all the little crooked atoms so perfectly interlaced, that no human hand could separate them; the more people tried the more they seemed to entangle them, like the rings in Roger's coat of mail. At last the whole ceremony, all their salutations, the whole performance coming to a standstill, it was necessary to separate the two by main force, and the stronger carried the day. But that which entirely disconcerted the gravity of the ceremony was good M. d'Hocquincourt's negligence, who is so accustomed to be dressed like the Provençals, or even Bretons, that his page's breeches being less commodious than those which he is accustomed to wear, his shirt would not remain in place, however much he wished it to do so. Knowing his condition, he tried constantly to put order to it, but always in vain, so that Madame la Dauphine could no longer contain her burst of laughter. It was deplorable; the majesty of the king itself was nearly shaken, and never in the history of the Order was such an adventure known."

There is another pretty account of the King of France going with true courtesy to welcome the Queen of England flying from her country, and a pleasant description of the little girls at St Cyr acting "Esther" before the Court. The king's remarks are chronicled. He came up to Madame de Sévigné:[1] "Madame, I am certain that you have been pleased," he said. She, without

[1] "It is to be remarked that Madame de Sévigné does not forget her prejudice against Racine, even in the king's dazzling company. In literature, as in politics and religion, she is always half a rebel."—J. A.

surprise: "Sire, I am charmed; that which I feel is beyond words." The king replies, "Racine has great cleverness." "Sire, he has much cleverness; but so, in truth, have these young ladies. They throw themselves into a subject as if they had never done anything else." To which the king replies, "Ah, yes, that is true;" and leaves Madame de Sévigné the object of universal envy.

"My small prosperities," says Madame de Sévigné, speaking of these events. But all this magnificence, and all the dignities bestowed, and the blue ribbons, did not go far to fill the empty coffers of the needy family of Grignan, whose difficulties had grown more and more uneasy to surmount.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEAR THE END OF THE JOURNEY.

The end of a life would be only sad to write and sad to read of, if it were not for certain redeeming things which in some degree perhaps make good the loss of the brightest and best treasures of existence. Youth and strength, hope, fervent aspiration, are the first flowers of a healthy natural life; then when these are over comes fruition, and then follows the seed-time; and old age, to those who have lived in some sympathy with the people and the things around them, should be the good and pregnant seed-time—width of understanding, tranquillity of soul, charity and fearlessness, and the knowledge of human weakness and its pathetic possibilities and impossibilities, all these are good seeds bearing priceless fruit. The brilliant, laughing, beautiful young woman, in her glittering coach with the six prancing horses, is not a more delightful figure than the gentle, generous-hearted mother, aged, impoverished, failing in health, softened, still devoted, still absorbed in her children's welfare, still planning, hoping, devising, living only for their wellbeing, and with what strength remained still shielding them to her utmost, as we have all seen young

leaves in the spring-time and early summer covered and protected from the cold by the last year's leaves as they wither on their stalks.

"You are old," wrote Madame de la Fayette in a letter full of heart and tender affection, urging Madame de Sévigné to consent to a certain plan which had been devised by two or three of her faithful old friends for subscribing together to bring her back to Paris to be among them all. But she would not hear of their scheme—she was with her son, she was happy, she could not be indebted to any of them. Madame de la Fayette's appeal fell strangely on her ears. "You were struck, as I was, by Madame de la Fayette's sentence. I own I was surprised, for as yet I feel no failure to remind me of this truth, which I should not forget." Speaking of her friends' alarm at her country winter, she describes the woods all penetrated with sunshine when there is any; the dry soil, the "Place Madame" facing the south, the end of a great avenue where the west works wonders. "When it rains," she says, "there is a comfortable room with a big fire. There is some company here, which, however, does not disturb me. I go my own way. When we are alone, everything is better still." This was written in 1689, when she was about sixty-three. No one has written of old age more touchingly and with greater wisdom:—

"In reality it is not at all what one expects. Providence leads us with so much goodness through the different stages of our life, that we hardly are conscious as they pass by. This loss is effected with such gentleness that it is imperceptible: it is the hand on the dial which we do not see moving. If at twenty they were to give us the position in the family,

and to show us in a looking-glass the countenance which we have or should have at sixty, comparing it with that of twenty we should be quite overcome and horrified at that face; but it is day by day that we grow older: to-day we are as we were yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day; and thus we go on without feeling it,—and this is one of the miracles of that Providence that I adore."

Elsewhere she says:—

"How foolish it is not to enjoy with gratitude the consolations which God sends us, after the afflictions which He sometimes causes us to feel! There is, it seems to me, great wisdom in enduring storms with resignation, and in enjoying the calm when it pleases Him to restore it to us, for this is to follow the ordinances of Providence. Life is too short to halt too long in one frame of mind; one must take the days as they come,—and I feel that I am of this happy temperament."

And she expresses her whole life in these few words.

There is something pleasant and useful in reading of the rest and tranquillity for others even two hundred years ago. I think this is the secret of the extreme popularity of certain books describing very simple monotonies, which go through as many editions as the most startling of sensational novels. Madame de Sévigné's life at this time was of this tranquil nature, and she seems to have stayed on nearly two years with her son and her daughter-in-law. Her life with them was a strange contrast to the life she spent with her daughter. She was economising as well as enjoying her children's society. Her house in Paris was shut up, her living cost little. Charles owed her moneys which he was glad to return in kind, as he owed her a duty and affection which he never failed to pay to the uttermost. He was

perhaps a better son than this mother deserved, who divided her love in two such unequal shares. "We lead a somewhat dull life," she writes. "I do not, however, imagine that more racket would be agreeable." And then, when Madame de Grignan exclaimed, and delighted her mother's heart by complaining, that she was not with her—

"You ask me, my best one, why I am not with you? Alas! how easy it would be to tell you why, if I chose to tarnish my letters with the reasons which oblige me to this separation! The misery of our country, all that is owed to me, the little which is paid—that which I owe to others, and the way in which I should have been overwhelmed and choked by my affairs if I had not, with infinite annoyance, taken this resolution. I cannot hazard hazardous conduct. That which I possess is no longer mine."

And she goes on to say that the time has come for her to render up her account to her children.

So she lingers on in the old house where she had come as a bride half a century before, where her children had grown up and grown to her heart,—where for her all she had ever loved and hoped for, as she looked around, must have crowded into the silent rooms, along the pretty green walks of the old parks. She looks around for the last time, and then starts off, crossing by country roads and byways to the south, leaving the stern but reviving country where so much of her life had been passed, descending by degrees into the warmth and glow and overflowing abundance of a southern life,—and is not her daughter at the journey's end?

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST.

"WHEN you see the date of this letter, my dear cousin," Madame de Sévigné writes to Bussy, "you will take me for a bird. I have passed courageously from Brittany to Provence. If my daughter had been at Paris I should have gone there; but knowing that she was spending the winter in this beautiful country, I resolved to spend it with her, and to come and enjoy her glowing sunshine."

Then she describes the sunshine, her arrival, the beautiful house, her welcome. This is a charming letter, which space prevents our giving in its completeness. She speaks of the death of Colbert's son. "It seems to me that splendour is dead," she says. Then she winds up with gentlest words of old affection. "Love me always," she says; "it is not worth while to change after all these years." Old as she is, according to Madame de la Fayette, she is writing her best. Some of her most striking and original passages occur in these latest letters. She was often ill during these last few years. Her rheumatism troubled her greatly, and she suffered in other ways. Years may have taken from her strength of body, but her mind did not fail, nor her

vividness and brilliance of intellect. Her letter on the death of Louvois is very striking and eloquent. She was near seventy when it was written.

"I am so entirely bewildered by the news of the sudden death of M. de Louvois, that I know not how to begin to speak of it to you. So he is dead, this great Minister, this eminent man, who held so great a place, whose *self*, as M. Nicole says, was so widely spread,—he who was the centre of so many things. What businesses, what designs, what profits, what secrets, what interests to disentangle, what wars to carry on, what intrigues, what a grand game of chess to play and to conduct! Ah, my God! give me a little time: I should like to give checkmate to the Duc of Savoy, checkmate to the Prince of Orange. No, no; you cannot have one instant, not one single instant. Is it possible to reason upon this strange event? No, in truth; it is only to be thought over alone in one's closet. This is the second Minister we have seen die since you have been at Rome. Nothing can be more different than their deaths, nor more equal than their fortunes."

So she writes of the Minister "formed by Louis" not many years before her own last year.

Here is a piece in still life that her contemporary, Rachel Ruysch, or Van Huysum himself, might have envied:—

"Our partridges are all fed on thyme, on sweet marjoram, and upon all the perfumes of our *sachets:* there is nothing to choose between them. I may say as much for our fat quails, whose thighs must part from their bodies at the first summons (they never fail to do it); and the turtle-doves are all quite perfect too. As for the melons, the figs, and the muscat grapes, they are marvels. If by some strange whim we were to try and find a bad melon, we should be obliged to send to Paris for it: there are none to be found here.

The figs are white and sweet; the muscats are like drops of amber, only delectable; and they would soon go to your head if you ate without measure, because it is as if you were drinking little sips of the most exquisite wine at Saint Laurent. My dear cousin, what a life! You know it under less sunny aspects. It does not in any way recall that of La Trappe. See what details I have gone into. It is chance which guides our pens!"

She seems to have been happy and at peace in this broad southern sunshine,—as ever, absorbed in her daughter's interests. The children were children no longer. Pauline was of marriageable age. The young Marquis was looking out for a wife, divided between stones and bread, it is said,—between money to retrieve their ancient state, and empty honours to add to their dignities. Madame de Sévigné's own health was still good, but she felt, as M. Mesnard justly says, that the time was comé for her to give up her own life and share her children's. Time was too short now for separations to be possible. All her interest had centred in one person. One last tender mother's office she rendered to the child she had borne in her youth. Madame de Grignan fell ill, and for months lay in a most critical condition, nursed by her mother and daughter. It was about this time that Pauline was engaged. Her wit and grace stood her in place of the *dot* to which she had so nearly been sacrificed. The Marquis de Simiane, the son of a neighbour, was the approved suitor.

Another less sentimental but extremely useful marriage was that of the young Marquis de Grignan with the daughter of a rich M. de St Amand. They hesitated between stones and bread, as I have said. The sensible

Coulanges strongly urged the money marriage. Madame de Grignan is described by Saint Simon as winking and blinking, and shrugging her shoulders, and saying confidentially to her friends that it was necessary from time to time to manure one's fields!

M. de St Amand was naturally very indignant with the haughty lady, and seems also to have had just reason to complain of her conduct respecting money. It is very difficult to be honest when the wherewithal does not exist. Becky Sharp's £3000 a-year would have gone a very short way with Madame de Grignan.

Of these marriages the grandmother writes to the President de Moulceau:—

"You have perhaps heard of the marriage of the Marquis de Grignan with Mdlle. de Saint Amand. You have seen her often enough at Montpellier to know her person. You may also have heard of her father. You may perhaps not be unaware that this marriage was solemnised with great preparations in the castle you are acquainted with."

To her son she goes into further details:—

"As for the complaints of Monsieur de Saint Amand, of which he has made so much noise at Paris, they are founded on the fact that my daughter having actually proved, by accounts which she has showed to us all, that she had actually paid nine thousand francs to her son out of the ten thousand she had promised him, and consequently having only sent him the remaining thousand, M. de Saint Amand declared that he was being cheated, that everything was being put upon him, and that he would give nothing more. All this passed off. M. de Saint Amand reflected that it would be unpleasant to quarrel with his daughter. He came here meek as any lamb, only wishing to please and to take back his daughter to Paris. The advantage of being there with her husband,

comfortably lodged in that fine house of Monsieur de Saint Amand's, well furnished, well fed, at no expense, induced unhesitating consent to her enjoyment of all these advantages. We did not see her go without tears, for she is very amiable. She, too, melted when she took leave of us, so that it did not seem as though she were in truth leaving us to commence a life full of agreeableness in the midst of abundance. . . . Believe me, my son, no Grignan had any intention of deceiving you. You are loved by all; and if this trifle had been a worthy thing, we should have been sure that you would have sympathised as you always do."

There are compliments and motherly recommendations to the young Marquise de Sévigné in this letter. She is ill, she must take care and be wrapped in cotton. She promises to send for some books which he has recommended. There is a significant allusion to two papers by M. de la Trappe. Charles had a great leaning towards an ascetic and contemplative life. He and his wife eventually joined a religious community in Paris, where he died not a very old man.

Of Pauline's marriage she writes to the President de Moulceau:—

"I take to myself the compliments which are my due, sir, on the marriage of Madame de Simiane. I only deserve the praise of having extremely approved that which my daughter had long since planned in her own mind. Nothing could be better. Everything is noble, convenient, and advantageous for a daughter of the house of Grignan, who has found in her husband and his family those who prize her merit, her person, and her name, and who care nothing for her fortune. And we have profited with pleasure of so rare and so generous a sentiment."

When Pauline was married in the chapel of the Chateau de Grignan, her mother was too weak to be

present at the ceremony. She had been suffering from a long and trying illness which, so it is said, killed, not Madame de Grignan, who recovered, but her tender and devoted mother.

"For three months," Madame de Sévigné writes, "my daughter has been overwhelmed with a sort of malady which is, they say, not dangerous, but which I find the saddest and most alarming of all those which can be endured. I confess to you, my dear cousin, that it kills me outright, and I am scarcely able to support the terrible nights this causes me to pass. . . . You must love your friends with all their failings, and it is a great one to be ill. God preserve you from it."

Madame de Sévigné's strength kept up while her daughter's illness still threatened danger: then when this was over for Madame de Grignan, the mother's strength must have failed her. One of the curses of those days was the smallpox, strangely fatal to the Sévigné family. Madame de Sévigné, exhausted by anxiety, caught the infection, without strength to resist its ravages. From the first she knew that her case was hopeless. May we not believe that this tender woman, true to her early and generous impulses, forbade those about her to let her daughter suspect her danger? Madame de Grignan still lay slowly and with difficulty recovering to life, while the aged and devoted parent was dying. Notwithstanding the terror which the illness inspired, the Marquise was devotedly nursed, so we are told, by two of her daughter's attendants, one of them being the faithful Mdlle. de Montgobert, of whom mention is often made in the letters. Madame de Sévigné died on the 10th of April 1696. Most of her generation had gone

before her—Bussy, the fierce cousin; Madame de la Fayette, the gentle and faithful; D'Haqueville, the untiring friend,—and now her own hour had come. "A brave woman facing death, which she foresaw from the first day of her illness, with firmness and surprising resignation. This person, so tender, so feeble where those she loved were concerned, only found courage and religion when she felt that she had but herself to think of." So writes her son-in-law[1] to little, laughter-loving Coulanges, who was almost the only one of her early companions left to mourn her loss. But a few days before she had been writing to him herself, —writing wearily and sadly enough, as if with a presentiment of sorrowful separation. The letter—the last of all her letters—is dated March 29, 1696. A few days more and the writer is at rest for ever.

[1] The letter is so cordially expressed, and so truly felt, that it is worth giving here :—

"You, sir, will understand, perhaps better than any other person, the greatness of the loss we have experienced, and my most just regret. You well knew the high merit of Madame de Sévigné. It is not only a mother-in-law I mourn—such a title does not always impose upon one; it is an amiable and faithful friend, a delicious companion. But she is still more worthy of our admiration than of our regret, as a brave woman facing death, which she foresaw from the first days of her illness, with firmness and surprising resignation. This person, so tender, so feeble, where those she loved were concerned, only found courage and religion when she felt that she had but herself to think of. We could not help observing how useful and of what importance it is to fill our minds with good things and holy readings, for which Madame de Sévigné had a taste, not to say an avidity that was truly surprising, when we realised the good use she knew how to make of these wise provisions in the last moments of her life. I tell you all these details, sir, because I am certain of your sentiments and of the affection you felt for her whom we mourn; and I own to you that my mind is so full of them, that it is a relief to me to find a man so well able as you are to listen to me."

"All other things ending, I weep and loudly bewail the death of Blanchefort, that amiable fellow whom we held up as an example to all our young men. His reputation was made, his valour well known and worthy of his name, his humour admirable for others and for himself (for ill humours torment), but his was good to his friends, good to his family, good to his mother, good to his grandmother; he loved and he honoured them, he knew their worth and took pleasure in making them feel his gratitude, thus repaying the excess of affection. He had good sense with his good looks, nor was his head turned by his youth, as is the case with so many of our young fellows, who seem to be possessed. . . . And this amiable boy disappears in one moment, as a flower blown away by the wind, without war, without reason. . . . My dear cousin, how am I to find words either to tell you what we here feel concerning the anguish of those two mothers, or to tell them how much they are in our thoughts? We do not dream of writing to them; but if at any opportunity you find the moment to name us, my daughter and myself, and the MM. de Grignan, this is our feeling concerning this irreparable loss. Madame de Vins has lost everything, I own; but when the heart has chosen between two sons, it sees one only: I can speak of nothing else. I bow to the holy and modest sepulchre of Madame de Guise. And Madame de Miramion, that mother of the Church, hers will be a public loss. Farewell, my dear cousin, I cannot change my tone. You have had your jubilee; your charming St Martin journey followed quickly upon the ashes and cinders of which you spoke to me, and the delights which Monsieur and Madame de Marsan now enjoy deserve that you should witness them and put them away in your wallet; and as for me, I deserve that I should be put into that one where you place those who love you; but I fear that for these you have no wallet."

And so she ends her long life's flow of written thoughts. The last few letters seem tired, the sentences

labour n ore heavily, the hands have held the pen so many years that it is time for them to lay it down; the sparkling stream runs slowly,—it no longer dances, bubbles, ripples, flashes back the thousand lights and twinkling points along the shore. Has it already met the salt waters of the sea? is it losing itself in the great waters?

END OF MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

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